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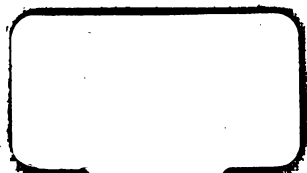
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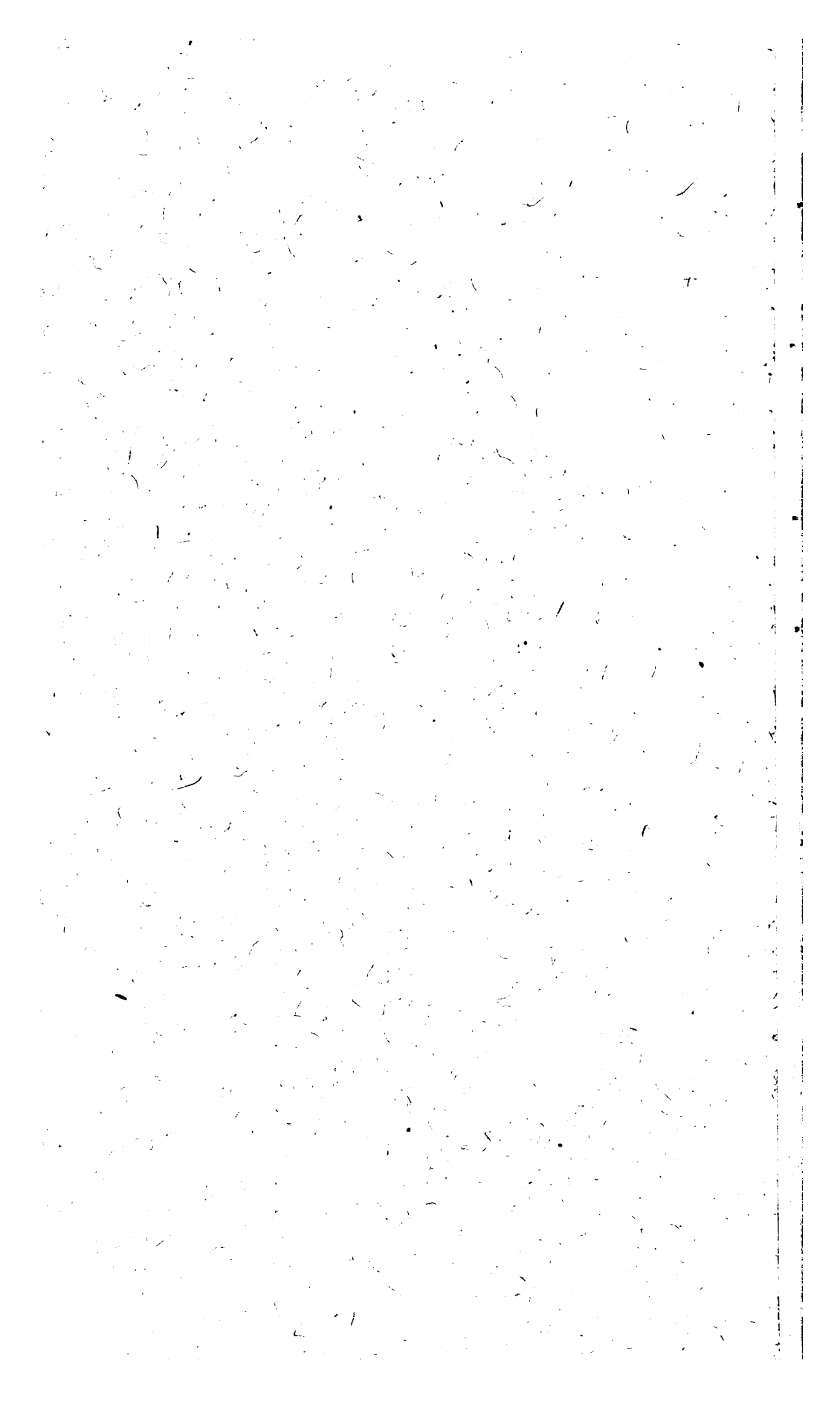
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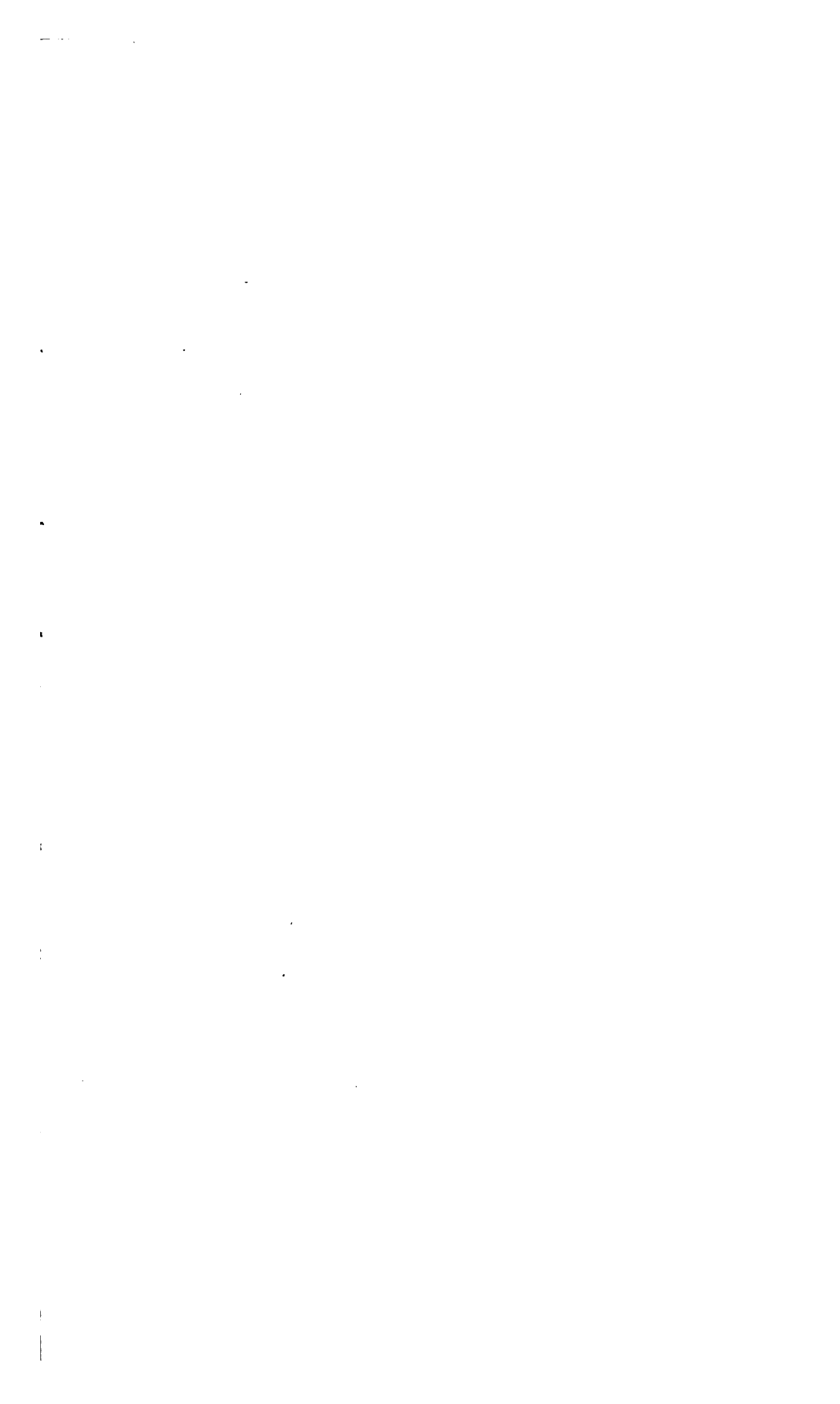
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Wistech





THE
HISTORY OF WISBECH,

WITH AN
HISTORICAL SKETCH OF THE FENS.

Hinc tibi concretâ radice tenacius hæsit,
Et penitus totis inolevit Roma medullis;
Dilectæque urbis tenero conceptus ab ungue
Tecum crevit amor.

Claud. de Cons. Hon. VI. v. 77.

Then Rome's firm roots, upon thy bosom fix'd,
Increas'd in depth, and with the vitals mix'd;
The city, in thy infancy rever'd
To thee, as youth advanc'd, more dear appear'd.

Hawkins.

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P R E F A C E .

THERE is an active element in the mind of man, which is every day becoming more ostensibly developed, and a thirst for literary information is now pervading all classes of society. Man is no longer contented in simply contemplating with indifference the ordinary events that pass before him ; but he carries his enquiries back to the earliest periods of history, and traces the progress of civilized society from its first infant state. It is to this increasing intelligence that we would appeal, and, next to the promulgation of the Holy Scriptures, we know not how the press can be better occupied, than by sending forth histories of countries and towns, emerging from a state of insignificance, by the unceasing industry of man.

We feel however that the subject, which we have undertaken, is surrounded with many difficulties, and our History may probably present as barren and unpromising an aspect as the country which it is intended to delineate.

It has been observed by Burke, and other philosophers, that our interest can only be powerfully excited by the representation of scenes of sorrow, and when we can call in the aid of pity, to weep over the desolation of fallen cities, and depopulated countries. It is this principle that operates so powerfully on our minds when we peruse the pages of Gibbon, Volney, and Eustace; and the researches of Belzoni in the deserts of Egypt, would never have been favored with so much regard, had he not had the tombs and pyramids to explore with all their historical and melancholy associations: it is this powerful principle also that enshrouds with the deepest interest, the lamentations of Milman over the fall of Jerusalem, of the highly-talented yet unhappy Byron over the deserted cities of Greece, of Campbell over the wrongs of the much injured Poles, of

the eloquent Curran over the sorrows of his unhappy country, and lastly of Milton (in the most beautiful of all compositions) over *Paradise Lost*. We have no scenes of similar grandeur, with all their tragic effect, to enliven our pages; we have no deserted cities, like Athens, Baalbec, and Palmyra with their ruins and their tombs;—no armies have for many centuries past ranged in all their wild and devastating career over our land; and when they did resort hither, we learn from Tacitus, that their time was occupied in the more noble employment of cultivation, and embankment.

We have no romantic legends with which we can adorn our history;—our country is not like that of the Swiss Alps or the Tyrol, where every hill, and every pass is celebrated, as the scene of some patriotic exploit;—we have only to trace a barren wilderness gradually brought into general fertility, and a Town progressively rising into a state of well-earned opulence; but there is an interest attached to our Town, and to our native soil that we can never banish,—it is

our home, it is the land which our fathers have cultivated ; and this simple fact is enough to cast a halo of beatitude around all our contemplations respecting it.

We shall probably be accused of giving way too much to the influence of imagination, particularly in our first Chapter, and of too frequently adopting the language of the Poets ; but we envy not the feelings of that man, "who can travel from Dan to Beersheba, and cry out that all is barren," and who can look down even on the little wildflowers that peep forth in spring without some agreeable association.

A primrose by the river's brim,
A yellow primrose is to him,
And it is nothing more.

To such cold and unfruitful minds we fear that our production will have few charms : although we cannot assert that the being, who despises poetical allusions, is devoid altogether of intelligence ; yet we agree with Dr. Burney, who, in the preface to his history of Music, states, that "the man who is capable of being effected with

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sweet sounds (and there is an inseparable alliance between poetry and music) is a being certainly more perfectly *organized* than he, who is insensible to, or offended by them."

We should also inform our reader, although it will perhaps be readily discovered, that our mind has not been nurtured in academic bowers; nor the luxuriance of an ardent imagination been tempered by the discretion of a well matured age. We have not toiled at the midnight lamp, nor allowed this task to interfere with our daily avocations; it is merely the offspring of a few leisure hours, and makes no claim to perfection. We have described all things as we have felt them, and as we believe they are, and in sending our little book amongst our friends, we feel a confidence that their benevolence will throw their superior talents into the shade, and that they will cast their shield over the author, who asks the greatest indulgence and protection at their hands.

We shall conclude these remarks with an ardent wish—nay, with a fervent prayer—that the blessings which have been, by a kind Providence, so

long and uninterruptedly extended to our land, may still continue to be preserved to it, and whilst we view with satisfaction, the rising prosperity of our native town, we would exclaim in the expiring wish of the famous Father Paul to his country,

· ESTO PERPETUA.

Wisbech, 1st October, 1833.

HISTORY OF WISBECH.

CHAPTER I.

Ancient and Modern Aspect of the Fens.

THE fens differ so materially from the other parts of the kingdom, that a short notice of their character, both ancient and modern, may not be uninteresting to the general reader. These wide districts were probably, in their first state, a portion of the sea, or a large extent of sand, liable to be covered with the tides ; but as they, in time, became silthed up, the waters left them entirely, when grass, and the first weeds of nature, began gradually to overspread the alluvial soil, which was afterwards, it is supposed, covered with one vast forest. Nothing authentic however on this point has been handed down to this remote age, and the only knowledge we can gather, is from the few and unconnected remarks of the general historian, or the researches of the industrious antiquary ; whose labors, as far as they are applicable to our subjects, we shall notice more at length in the succeeding Chapter, where we propose to enter, with greater minuteness, into the history of the Fens.

The aspect, which the country formerly presented even in the height of Summer, was desolate in the extreme. Long sweeping plains and a waste of waters, with here and there a cultivated spot to relieve the wide and bleak uniformity, was all that met the eye, save where a watermill shadowed the distance, or a thin tapering spire, with its little consecrated pasture around it, seemed like an Oasis in the barren desert, only serving to make the mind more sensible of the cheerless scene around it. The few trees that could thrive in such a soil were generally scattered round some village or farm-house, and even these stood fixed and withering, with scarcely a shade of foliage upon their branches. The village church often appeared among the open fields so bleak and unprotected, that the mind might, without effort, conceive it some useless relic of the past, left for the elements to sport and play around its loneliness; while the sun, that enlivens and beautifies almost every other landscape, seemed here, from the dreary objects which he enlightened, to produce a sickly glow, as if he scorned to look lovingly on such uncouth desolation.

When the traveller first descended from the higher country into these marshy wilds, they must have appeared extremely desolate; and as he contrasted them with the delightful landscapes, which he had left, he must have found it difficult to have mingled the idea of existence with such a solitude of prospect. Not a hill of the most inconsiderable magnitude was to be seen in all the long distance. Cottages, or rather huts, roofed with reeds, were thinly interspersed over the scene, vast trails of smoke would frequently be perceived sus-

pended for miles along the country,* and the view was only terminated by the horizon on the one hand, or the distant heights of the upland country on the other. Where we now see the laborer and the husbandman busied in their cheerful occupations, then was only to be seen some miserable object, gathering the rush and sedge, or collecting peat to cheer the loneliness of his wintry night.

This scene must, in some measure, have partaken of the indescribably lonesome and still character of the American Prairie; but was without its stern sublimity and majestic grandeur of rugged surface; perhaps Holland bore a more striking resemblance to it, for black stagnant waters, a continued lifelessness of aspect, and obnoxious humidity of atmosphere were common both to the Isle of Ely and the Netherlands. Both countries too were subject to rapid and violent deluges, that rooted up the soil, and laid vegetation prostrate. The flood often came so unexpectedly, that the farmer had scarcely time to preserve his cattle from its ravages, and cottages were swept away by its wild force. Frequently on the approach of these floods, the bell of the parish church was rung at irregular intervals to sound an alarm, while boats were used to convey the people from house to house.† What could be more desolate than a scene like this! To view the uncontrolled waters raging over the fields, and round the lately

* The practice of burning the land for cultivation is still continued in the lower district of the fens.

† This circumstance has taken place at Thorney, within the memory of some of its oldest inhabitants.

tenanted habitations, and to hear the voice of a sudden sea breaking where the corn waved in harvest and the cattle grazed in Spring !

Pale mothers then
Wept without hope, and aged heads struck cold
By agues trembled like red autumn leaves ;
And infants moaned and young boys shrieked with fear.
Stout men grew white with famine. Beautiful girls
Whom the day languished to look on, lay
On the wet earth and wrung their drenched hair.

Every road became impassible, and the whole land seemed as if it would have become again mingled with the Ocean ; sea-gulls hovered in the air, and the wild duck again sought its deserted hiding place.

The traveller must have been also not more forcibly surprised than disappointed by the absence of the songsters of the groves ; here, scarcely a note of melody was ever heard ; or, if heard, was of that pensive and companionless wildness, that awoke feelings of sadness rather than of joy. The shy bittern stalked over the common, the lapwing screamed in the dull air,* the water fowl was seen hurrying with a timid yet rapid step to its swampy retreat, and the gigantic Heron cumbrously working its way through the storm. We may suppose the poet had some such scene in his mind, when he composed the following beautiful and appropriate lines :

* Along thy glades, a solitary guest,
The hollow-sounding bittern guards its nest ;
Amidst thy desert walks the lapwing flies,
And tires its echos with unvaried cries.

Goldsmith.

TO A WATER FOWL.*

Whither, 'midst falling dew,
While glow the heavens with the last steps of day,
Far, through their rosy depths, dost thou pursue
Thy solitary way.

Vainly the fowler's eye
Might mark thy distant flight to do thee wrong,
As, darkly painted on the crimson sky,
Thy figure floats along.

Seeks't thou the plashy brink
Of weedy lake, or marge of river wide,
Or where the rocking billows rise and sink
On the chafed ocean side?

There is a power whose care
Teaches thy way along that pathless coast,—
The desert and illimitable air;—
Lone wandering, but not lost.

All day thy wings have fanned,
At that far height, the cold, thin atmosphere;
Yet stoop not, weary, to the welcome land,
Though the dark night is near.

And soon that toil shall end;
Soon shalt thou find a summer home, and rest
And scream among thy fellows; reeds shall bend
Soon o'er thy sheltered nest

* Written by William Cullen Bryant, an American poet of considerable talent and taste; the following lines from Thomson, are however as expressive of our subject.

The cormorant on high
Wheels from the deep, and screams along the land;
Loud shrieks the soaring heron; and, with wild song,
The circling sea-fowl cleave the flaky clouds.

Thou'rt gone ; the abyss of heaven
Hath swallow'd up thy form ; yet on my heart
Deeply hath sunk the lesson thou hast given,
And shall not soon depart.

He, who, from zone to zone,
Guides through the boundless sky thy certain flight,
In the long way that I must tread alone,
Will lead my steps aright.

A peculiarity of these marshes, which could not fail to be noticed by the stranger, was the extensive fields of reed, which were sometimes met with, and, though they have been greatly diminished by drainage and enclosure, traces of them may still be found. Here innumerable starlings, which live upon the seeds of this aquatic plant, flocked in such vast quantities, that on a surprise from the fowler, they darkened the air with their countless numbers.* Wild Geese also congregated together among the sedgy fields, and are even now often seen during a fine Autumn evening, winging their flight to some far distant land. Besides these birds the Water Rail, Snipe, Curlew, Widgeon, Coot, Cormorant, Teal, Kingfisher, Bustard, Quail, Marsh Hawk, Ruff and Reeve, Plover, and occasionally the Sea or Fen Eagle, made this place their resort at some season of the year, and the Wild Duck was constantly seen hovering over the decoy.

As decoys are gradually becoming banished from these marshes, and consequently from the kingdom, we have been induced to transcribe the following descrip-

* We have several times lately witnessed this scene near to the Roman Bank, in the pretty village of Leverington.

tion of them, from Richards' History of Lynn. This once general custom of obtaining the Wild fowl of the fens will probably in a few years belong only to the past.

"A decoy is generally made where there is a large pond surrounded with wood, and beyond that a marshy uncultivated country. If the piece of water is not thus surrounded, it will be attended with noise and other accidents, which may be expected to frighten the wild-fowl from a quiet haunt where they mean to sleep during the day-time in security. As soon as the evening sets in, the decoy *rises* (as the term is) and the wild-fowl feed during the night. If the evening be still, the noise of their wings, during their flight, is heard at a very great distance, and is a pleasing, though melancholy sound. The *rising* of the decoy in the evening is, in Somersetshire, called *radding*. The decoy-ducks are fed with hempseed, which is thrown over the screen in small quantities, to bring them forward into the pipes of canals, and to allure the wild-fowl to follow as the seed floats. There are several *pipes*, as they are called, which lead up a narrow ditch that closes at last with a funnel net. Over these pipes, (which grow narrower from their first entrance) is a continued arch of netting, suspended on hoops. It is necessary to have a pipe, or ditch for almost every wind that can blow, as upon this circumstance it depends which pipe the fowl will take to; and the Decoy-man always keeps on the *windward* side of the ducks, holding near his mouth a lighted turf, to prevent his breath or effluvia reaching their sagacious nostrils. Along each pipe, at certain intervals are placed screens, made of reeds, so situated and contrived

of turfy and pestiferous bogs, whose life seems to generate where that of man becomes impaired.*

Having treated of the plants and birds, which were formerly most generally found in this part of the country, it might naturally be supposed that we should proceed to enumerate the Animals, Insects, and Fishes, which were indigenous to these marshes, or, at least, most frequently noticed here; but we know of no animals, that made this place their abode differing from those that resort to other counties; and the insects were of the usual class that are found in damp lands and stagnant waters. Gnats, for instance, during a summer favorable for their propagation, swarmed in the evening air, and perhaps the Dragon-fly, the Water-Devil, † and the Ephemera or Ephemeridæ ‡ are also worthy of notice. Fish, as may be supposed from the quantity of water, were the most numerous,—the Pike, Eel,

* Aqua.—teterrima * * * *

mali culices, ranæque palustres

Hor: Sat. v. 7—14.

The water here was of so foul a stream, * *
The fenny frogs, with croakings hoarse and deep
And gnats, loud buzzing.

Francis.

† This insect is known to entymologists by the name of the *British Hydrophilus*, and is nearly allied to the *Dytiscus*, another species of water-beetle. During his short, but calamitous existence, this tyrant devours every other insect that unwarily comes within its grasp.

‡ This gentle guest of our stagnant waters, enjoys a life of little more than six hours, arising from its generative state at about six in the evening, and dying at midnight.

Bream, Tench, Roach, Perch, and the minute yet multitudinous Stickle-back were plentifully supplied by almost every considerable drain, particularly the last, which were propagated in such vast quantities that they were used by the farmer for manuring purposes. *

The atmosphere of the fens next claims our attention,—this was generally humid and dull; but, like other parts of our Island, liable to the most constant changes. Thick fogs in the early part of Winter sometimes continued for days together, just dissipating at noon for a few hours, and then coming on again towards the close of evening, with a most chilling and drenching density, which the eye sought in vain to penetrate. This air to one accustomed to a more elevated region, must have been oppressively heavy; but the most striking and important peculiarity of the atmosphere, was its injurious nature after the heats of summer, when the retiring waters became clogged with weeds, and impure with stagnation. The atmosphere lying, as it then usually did, in sullen lifelessness, accumulated and hoarded the poisonous effluvia of the marshes in its bosom, and caused a healthless langor in the inhabitants, which frequently terminated in death. During the heavy dews of October and November a mournful dignity of solitude overspread all,—stern and unenlivened, even to severity. Never was desertion more forcibly felt, every thing was one continued scene of gloom and silence. As the year however drew towards its close

* We are aware that this part of our subject, treating of the Plants, Insects, &c. might be considerably enlarged; but the limits of this portion of our work will not admit of fuller explanation.

and the frost set in, the wild became more animated. Every cottage sent forth its skaters, and none were more swift and masterly at this exercise than the fenmen,—a preeminence they retain to the present day, rivaling the Hollanders in the rapidity and dexterity of their movements. This was a short carnival of gaiety for the inhabitants. Hilarity and holiday gladdened every countenance, and in some measure atoned for the former unsocial dreariness of scene. The pastime however was but of short duration, for suddenly the storm came on, raging with its wintry violence,—

Till boundless snows the withered heath deform,
And the dim sun scarce wanders through the storm.

The whole country soon became one boundless track, presenting a prospect of matchless sublimity,—white and glittering,—seeming to stretch out to the limit of the universe, and uncontrasted with any dark object in all its extent of brightness.

The breaking up of the ice and the melting of the snow was always a subject of alarm to the inhabitants in consequence of those fearful deluges, of which we have before spoken; while the winds as they broke over this vast plain, having nothing to impede the progress of their fury, were piercingly keen and violent. The cottager, as he sat cowering over his little fire, at this season of the year, has often heard the elements awake with all their desolating strength, howling uninterruptedly along the outstretched plain, mingled with shrill cries of the fen-birds as they battled with the blast. At such an unearthly moment what must have been his fear! Often has the impetuous storm swept

the frail hut away, and cast the treasures of his industry a wreck upon the waters.

But if such was the scene of danger and desolation, that was in former times, perpetually presented to the eye; it is a desolation that has vanished, and it now becomes our more pleasing duty to exhibit this country in its present state of security and cultivation;—the clouded picture which has been moving before us has now to be embellished with the colors of refinement, and the charms of a more humanized society.

The improvements of modern years have been no where more apparent, than in the many plantations which have been reared in our neighbourhood. These have greatly enriched the appearance of the country, as every one must suppose who is acquainted with the spirit and luxury that trees infuse over a landscape, no fictitious or artificial beauty can atone for their absence. We have seen that many years have not elapsed since scarcely a feature of animated existence softened the rigidity of the waste. Now however this stern prospect has passed away, and a cheerfulness, if not a beauty of scenery, has supplied its place; but perhaps the principal cause of the improvement in the aspect of the Fens, is the advancement that has been made in the art of drainage by which all the stagnant waters now find a ready passage to the sea.

Many are apt to conceive the Fens as only calculated for the residence of the lowest ranks of husbandmen, whose tastes and feelings are supposed to be as rough as their unpolished minds. Such a picture, though applicable enough to the country we have just delineated, has little unison with its present appearance,—the sweep

of surface, the solitude of objects, and the silence of desertion, has each been soothed into features more congenial to our ideas of companionable beauty. The more secluded parts have certainly few recommendations for residence, and are but little improved upon their ancient dreariness; but even here cultivation has done much, and scarcely a rood of land is left to waste or indolence.*

Instead of the miserable straw-roofed cabin of the ancient fenman, which had all the squalid nakedness of that described by Crabbe;

A Room, which one rude beam divides,
And naked rafters form the sloping sides;
Where the vile bands that bind the thatch are seen,
And lath and mud are all that lie between;
Save one dull pane, that, coarsely patched, gives way,
To the rude tempest, yet excludes the day.

Instead of such a painfully wretched hut, every peasant has now his comfortable little pastoral cottage, adorned with its honeysuckle, its jasmine, its roses, or its scrupulously trained vine; and is rarely without its fresh plot of garden ground. Here also is now to be found the spacious farm-house with its flower-garden, its orchard, and cool shade of trees, while the more stately edifices of the opulent are frequently embedded in

* That eloquent divine, the Rev. Robt. Hall, who was a warm lover of nature, invariably expressed his disrelish of Cambridgeshire scenery. 'I always say of my Cambridge friends' said he 'when I witness their contentedness in such a country, "Herein is the faith and patience of the saints."' In another place, speaking of the scanty and stunted vegetation of the flats, he calls it 'Nature putting forth flags of distress.'

foliage ; and, though it may seem ungenial to the soil, yet fruits and flowers of the choicest kind are frequently cultivated with much success. The Fig-tree and Pomegranate, the Clematis, Japonica, Passion-Flower, and

The spiry Myrtle with unwithering leaf,

that choice little emblem of constancy, thrive in the open air, while many exotics adorn the green-house and conservatory, where the disciples of Flora and the learned in plants may enjoy the delights of an unrestrained botanical research. The church, that was once open and unprotected, is now surrounded by trees of the most luxuriant growth, and the traveller frequently knows his approach to it only by the sweet-toned bell echoing over the landscape.

The Heron, the Wild Swan, and Cormorant have taken their flight to some more cheerless and uncultivated region, and their places are supplied by the more melodious birds.—The Cuckoo, the Thrush, the Black-bird chant their various song ; the Lark hovers in the cloud, and it has been asserted that the Nightingale has occasionally been heard.* The occupation of the fowler has almost entirely ceased, and the gun of the sportsman resounds in our fields. The shy and sensitive

* We confess ourselves attached to birds, and have watched for hours though unsuccessfully, "beneath the joyous moon" for his truly melancholy note, and we regret that we do not possess that happy turn of a romantic mind, which can render the pleasures of imagination equal to reality, or summon things hoped for into being with a wish.

Partridge is seen hurrying to the shade of the waving corn and the beautiful and stately Pheasant occasionally becomes a denizen of our plantations, though the society of the other birds appears but ill adapted to its own natural elegance.

From these observations it will be seen that although this part of our country cannot boast of such scenery as is combined where mountain and cavern, lake and cataract blend their picturesque beauty, and although the banks of the Nene cannot be placed in competition with those of the Derwent or the Wye; yet, when, after having spent years of dull and tedious uniformity in this flat uninteresting land, we are permitted to visit such enchanting landscapes as the heights of Matlock or the Isle of Wight present, how much more do we appreciate their value and their beauty, than if we had been accustomed to them from our infancy;—and should we never chance to quit these cheerless scenes, yet there is much around us that ought to induce content. Our pastures exhibit the same profusion of fleecy flocks and herds of lowing cattle as other counties do. The heavenly bodies move around us in all their majestic grandeur,—the sun emits the same glittering rays, and the moon beams forth the same quiet and consoling light, cheering us in the hours of our solitude and retirement.*

The floor of heaven
Is thick inlaid with patens of bright gold.

* “Softening down the hoar austerity
Of rugged desolation.”

The Aurora Borealis is sometimes seen casting forth its streaming light; the clouds are tinted with the beautiful shades of the setting Sun, and assume all their more wild and gigantic features; the Omnipotent 'rides on the whirlwind and directs the storm' or 'scattereth his hoar-frost like ashes' and the Rainbow, that gracious token of promise, with its expansive arch is stretched out from horizon to horizon. These are glorious scenes which the inhabitants of the fens can partake of in common with those of more delightful districts. With the thick fogs that formerly enveloped the atmosphere has vanished that Bæotian dulness, which was said to have hovered around the intellect of the fenman;—his mind like the soil he walks upon has become more cultivated, and he is not insensible of the Being 'who sits supreme at the head of the universe, is armed with infinite power, and pervades all nature with his presence,' in short he now can

Look through nature up to nature's God,

CHAPTER II.

History of the Fens.

HAVING in the preceding chapter, endeavored to present a faithful picture of the Fens in their past and present aspect, it now only remains for us to trace their History.

Little beside vague conjecture and uncertain tradition invests the early history of the most flourishing kingdoms of the world, it would therefore be presumptuous to hope to gather much, relating to this obscure part of the country, from the remote ages into which we would now seek to penetrate. In our last chapter we remarked that general opinion confounded this wide tract with the sea, where the tides ebbed and flowed in the first ages of the world; an hypothesis supported by many writers, who have carefully studied and analysed the geological formation of the Fens, as well as by the representations of the most ancient of our Historians. Conceiving this to be correct we are led to suppose, that

the earliest desertion of the waters was caused by the continual deposit of soil, until the tides could no longer regularly overflow it. Vegetation of course succeeded, till in time, the entire country became overspread with trees, and assumed the character of an immense forest, traces of which are to this day perceived in many parts. As society began to spread we are told that those portions of the country which were of highest elevation, and most favorable for habitation, were cleared and peopled; but as any considerable swell of the ocean must, at that time, have been dangerous to so low a country, unprotected as it was by banks or any artificial means of keeping the sea within its boundaries, the very precariousness of the situation must have prevented any considerable population from settling here; and it appears that not many ages elapsed ere this immense waste was again deluged, and so effectually that during an unknown length of years a powerful flood remained on the soil. By what means this important change was effected is also involved in darkness; but no common invasion of the sea could have produced so enduring and formidable a devastation.

It was thought by Sir Wm. Dugdale, whose important research and indefatigable labor on subjects connected with drainage ought to induce us to place confidence in his opinions, that the Fens were never inundated by the sea, or a part of it; but were always firm dry land, covered with woods and verdure, and in part abounding in deer; and that the formations which lead us to suppose the sea formerly overspread the country, were occasioned by a great land flood, which,

meeting with obstructions at its outfall, covered the entire land, and effected, by a long continuance, every peculiarity which we attribute to the usurpation of the ocean. * These characteristics of the country, though they are interesting foundations for conjecture, afford little satisfactory evidence to the mind, however, as the ancient condition of the Fens has called forth much speculation from authors, and occasioned geologists to expend upon it much anxious research, we will here give a few examples, illustrating the former state of the land.

In the Philosophical Transactions for 1799 a paper appeared, written by Dr. J. C. de Serra, which gave an account of a Submarine Forest at Sutton, on the coast of Lincolnshire. The author, who seems to have bestowed much of his attention and learning on the subject, observes that he was induced to his task by a report that a large extent of Islets or Moor, situated along the coast, and visible only during those periods of the year when the tides ebb lowest, was chiefly composed of decayed trees. During repeated visits, though the tide was rather unfavorable for complete observation, the Dr. was enabled to ascertain that the Islets consisted almost entirely of roots, trunks, branches, shrubs, and the leaves of trees and aquatic plants,—some standing on their roots, but the trunks of the greater part lying scattered on the ground. Birch, Fir, and Oak were still

* Ellstob, like Sir. Wm. Dugdale, is of opinion that 'the upper and principal part of the great Level of the Fens, was anciently and originally good and sound ground, plentifully stocked with wood and large timber trees.' Hist. Bed. Level p. 234.

distinguishable, and although the timber was generally decomposed and soft, yet the barks and roots appeared as fresh as those of living trees, 'even' says he 'the thin silver membrane of outer skin was discernible.' The soil in which these fossil trees were found was soft clay; but a strata of leaves, some inches in thickness lay above them. *

Our author next proceeds to trace the epoch of the vegetable destruction, and by what agency it was effected. He first treats of the primitive order of fossil vegetables, which we commonly ascribe as belonging to the antediluvian period of the world. With this order he thinks the remains on the Lincolnshire coast have no connexion; but with the second order, which comprehends those found in clay or sand, and which are supposed to have been deposited there by the force of powerful currents; as the American river, Mississippi does in the present day; † though the remains at Sutton,

* In the large tracts of low land which lie on the S. bank of the river Humber, near its mouth, there is a subterraneous stratum of decayed trees and shrubs, exactly like those at Sutton, particularly in Axholm isle and at Hatfield chase. Sir William Dugdale remarks, that the oaks of the former place were found lying in multitudes, some being of the extraordinary size of five yards in compass and sixteen long, with quantities of small nuts and acorns near them. They appeared to have been burnt asunder, and not felled by the axe.

† It seems almost satire to connect in one sentence, this most beautiful of rivers with the black, sluggish, contemptible streams of the marshes. After watering three thousand miles of a country, unequalled in loveliness, and embracing every variety of scenery, this splendid stream descends into the ocean, with a roar and impetuosity

he is of opinion, grew on the spot where they were found ; which, as it is below the level of the sea, and must in such a situation have been covered by its waters, he supposes the force that destroyed them, lowered the ground on which they stood ; and instancing an earthquake as the most probable cause of the sudden sinking of the ground, he comes in conclusion to the following determination, that ‘the original catrastrophe which lowered this forest was of very ancient date ; but that the inroad of the sea which uncovered the decayed trees of the islands of Sutton was comparatively recent.’

befitting its mighty dignity. At one time it is beheld flowing through deserts of unbroken silence, and forests of awful gloom ; at another bursting from the bowels of lofty mountains, foaming down the eternal cataract, enriching the painted bosom of the valley, or straying through wild and savage glens, where only the Indian war-whoop and the howl of the wolf have been heard since the first morn of time. Often on the summer serenity of its waters are seen floating islands of flowers, on which the gorgeous tropical birds, voyage and repose in delicious security ; while trees of every lustrous variety line its banks, and spread incense over its waves. But it is when swelled by the winter torrent, after the storms have torn up whole forests and scattered them on its waters, that the lordly river becomes the most beautiful and sublime ; weeds twine round and connect the floating logs, and shrubs implant themselves on the green slime of the timber, and thus floating bowers sweep on the still eddy of the stream, and are rolled along the headlong torrents, until they approach the sea ; where the fury of the current separates them in every direction, and they are thus lodged on the shore, or driven wildly into the interminable ocean. In this way Dr. Serra supposes the trees on the Sutton coast were deposited, but it is comparing a Pygmy to a Giant.

How impotent would all the pomps and insolencies of Society be to a home amid such stupendous scenes !

Many other curious phenomena, evidently showing that the Fens were suddenly and completely inundated during many years, have also been made public. We shall select the principal of these and then resume our History.

Dugdale mentions a causeway, supposed to have been made by the direction of the Roman Emperor Severus, extending from Denver to Peterborough, a length of 24 miles. This was composed of gravel, being 60 feet broad and 3 feet deep. * When discovered however it was covered with moor from 3 to 5 feet in thickness.

On the erecting a sluice near Magdalen Bridge, during the reign of Elizabeth, furze bushes, and nut-trees with their fruit on them were discovered seventeen feet beneath the surface of the soil in a perfectly preserved state. This rests on the authority of Sir Wm. Dugdale, who also observes that such bushes are now unknown in Marshland.

Ellstob relates that in driving the piles of the sluice at the mouth of the new cut, near Boston, in 1764, roots of trees were found at eighteen feet depth, which were in such a state of preservation that many were obliged to be 'chopt through' before the piles could be driven. Small sea shells were also discovered at the same time and place.

* This appears to have been the usual manner of making roads by the Romans. Gibbon, in his second preliminary Chapter to the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, says 'The middle part of the road was raised into a terrace, which commanded the adjacent country, consisted of several strata, of sand, gravel, and cement, and was paved with large stones.' Vol. 1. p. 82.

Sir Robert Cotton de Bruce, the Antiquary, while making a pool near Connington Downs, Hunts., found, at the depth of six feet, the petrified skeleton of a large sea-fish, nearly twenty feet in length.

Sir Wm. Dugdale relates that in digging a moat at Whittlesea, the laborers came to a perfect soil eight feet below the surface of the land with swaths of grass on it, lying as they were first mowed.*

In digging the foundation of Skirbeck sluice, near Boston, a Smith's forge was discovered with all the tools belonging to it, embedded in silt sixteen feet deep. A cart wheel has also been found at a similar depth near Magdalen fall. Near the river Welland several boats have been found at the depth of ten feet, and also contiguous to the same place, the remains of ancient tan-vats or pits, a quantity of horns, and shoe soles with the toes pointed and turned up, were discovered.†

In 1636 on deepening Wisbech river, seven boats were found eight feet below the former bottom, in a stony soil. Spears, shields, and military weapons have been taken from the rivers of the Middle Level of the Fens, and in 1829, on deepening the river at Ely, a very antique sword was found, in a high state of preser-

* Were such a question worth investigation, this circumstance would tend materially to fix the period of the inundation, which must have happened in summer or early autumn, and have been unforeseen by the inhabitants. The time is also corroborated by the nuts and acorns ante-mentioned.

† Stowe and Baker mention such as being worn in the time of Richard II., (1382).

vation. Human bodies have also in many parts been disinterred, 'the remains perhaps,' says Mr. Wells, 'of unfortunate persons, lost in attempting to cross the Fens in their undrained state.'

The general conclusion to be deduced from all these evidences seems to be that the Fens in some hidden age were suddenly and entirely inundated, during a long but indefinite period. The means and the cause of such a flood are alike unknown; nor can we arrive at much more than vain supposition in all our attempts at truth. While one author contends that the sea broke its boundaries, and resistlessly overflowed the whole Fen,* another and more general opinion seems to be that the deluge was occasioned by a great land flood, which from meeting with obstructions at its natural outfall, overspread and drowned the country in every part, while some, have very improbably we think, considered an earthquake as the cause of such a devastation. The only supposition most allied to certainty we can arrive at is, that the surface of the Fens are now some feet higher than they were originally, and that this must have been brought about by some uncommon operation of nature.

Neither history nor tradition have intimated the time when this waste was secured by the agency of art. The ancient Britons have been represented to posterity as a

* We lately chanced to pick up a clod of clay, which had been recently dug from a drain, and, on breaking it, found within, several fossil sea-shells of curious form. We do not mention this as an argument that the sea anciently flowed here, as these may be antediluvian remains; but certainly it is no wild chimera to assert, that an ocean has, at some foreign period of time, overflowed this portion of England.

people of savage propensities and barbarous habits, who gained their subsistence from the precarious chase, and who knew little of the advantages of commerce or the blessings of society. Such a people were unlikely to engage in any laborious operation, and we therefore attribute the earliest works for improving this tract of country to the most important period of the early History of the Fens,—the time of the Romans.

This celebrated people, having raised themselves from barbaric hardihood to civilized strength and magnificence, and humbled to their empire the whole known continent of Europe, spread their sails, and, after an ineffectual resistance from the British natives, landed triumphantly in this island.

A people to whom order is a stranger and artifice is the principle of war, can only be entirely subdued by time and perseverance. Frail victories over scattered and fluctuating squadrons were the first weak conquests of the Romans. The indignant Cæsar, little used to such contemptible triumphs, retired in disgust, and left his generals to prosecute a war which seemed to degrade the majesty of the Roman name. During years this harrassing mode of combat was continually carried on. The haughty Britons rebelling against their masters and defying their power, were continually on the watch to slay and to exterminate them. The forests which overran this part of the kingdom, offered considerable advantages to the assailants, by their sheltering and almost impenetrable wildness, which it was not probable they would overlook. We are informed therefore that among these thick woods the Roman legions had little power over such irregular hordes, who,

like the Indians of America, poured their missiles from every side; and then, by their fleetness and agility fled exultingly from their pursuers to some lonely swamp or vast morass where none but themselves dare penetrate, and they would even for concealment sometimes immerse their entire bodies in the foul water of the bogs, leaving but the head visible. * Such a species of warfare, so galling to a civilized conqueror and so congenial to the habits of barbaric life, greatly irritated the Roman soldiers, who, however heroic in the field, quailed at the idea of venturing among the tangled mazes of briary thickets, through the horrid gloom of frightful labyrinths, or in the bloodied footsteps of the prowling wolf; where the uncertain swamp might sud-

* The following from an Oxford Prize Poem, the Aboriginal Britons, describes, very happily, the country and inhabitants of this distant age.

Through fleecy clouds the balmy spring-tide smiled;
But all its sweets were wasted on a wild :
In vain mild Autumn shore with mellowing gleam ;
No bending fruitage blush'd beneath the beam.
Rudely o'erspread with shadowy forests lay
Wide trackless wastes that never saw the day :
Rich fruitful plains now waving deep with corn,
Frown'd rough and shaggy with the tangled thorn :
Through joyless heaths and valleys dark with woods,
Majestic rivers roll'd their useless floods :
Full oft the hunter check'd the ardent chase,
Dreading the latent bog and green morass ;
While, like a blasting mildew, wide were spread
Blue thickening mists in stagnant marshes bred.
O'er scenes thus wild adventurous Cæsar stray'd
And joyless viewed the conquests he had made.

denly encompass them, or the arrows of their lurking enemies unwarily surprise them. Seeing therefore that no threatenings of severity or professions of clemency could work upon the stubborn nature of their foes, the soldiers of Cæsar resolved at last on the laborious effort of felling the most considerable portion of the trees of these Fens, and thus lay bare the secret hiding places with which they abounded.* This reduced the Britons to their last resources, and finally subdued them. The whole country lay before the victors, a conquered province, who immediately turned their attention to the improvement and security of its forsaken marshes, and desolate wastes.

Had the chronicles of this age reached us in their undisguised and powerful truth, we know not what could have been more interesting to the moralist or the historian. The contrast of the uncivilized ardor of the Britons with the cautious policy of the Romans, of the free and fierce denizens of nature with the proud and mercenary soldiers of Italy, would have presented a wide but fertile field of human character. Savage warfare knows little of the stiff and formal parade of military discipline. The barbarian acts by impetuous impulse, he drains the blood of his foe in the hot hour of passion, and feels no repugnance in staining his arrow with the death of an unarmed victim. The civilized being, on the contrary, takes up the weapons of death in his coolest moment, and aims at life with a horrid deliberation.

* We are informed by Cæsar himself that he was obliged to pursue a similar method, in subduing the inhabitants of the Fens in France and Flanders.

He knows his power over undisciplined bravery, and by the art, we might almost say, the guilt of experience, robs a victory for which he has little other regard, than as it gives liberty to one of the blackest and most sanguinary passions of the soul—that of indiscriminate slaughter. In this way we have too much reason to fear the innocent, though unyielding Britons were mown down by their merciless victors; and in this way we know that the name of Spaniard, Portuguese, and Englishman have been polluted to the latest posterity, in connexion with the unhappy Aborigines of America.*

The Romans were not a people to waste with effeminate and idle indulgence, the rough vigor which war and toil had hardened in the soul; though ambition had doubtless no little share in each of their undertakings. They at once saw the important results that might be obtained from the embankment of these flats, and by thus confining the ravages of the main, give an important province to their already cumbrous dominions. Were it proper in this place we might here indulge in some curious enquiries on the avarice of that ambition, which could be so covetous of a scanty and obscure corner of the earth, when the fairest states and the proudest monarchs were trembling before it; but such is the despicable thirst of power that the desire of the soul increases with accumulated power, and when a

* Down to the dust the Indian people pass'd
Like autumn foliage withering in the blast;
The whole race sunk beneath th' oppressors' rod,
And left a blank among the works of God.

Montgomery.

world lies at the feet of a tyrant, an Alexander weeps that he has not more worlds to blast and despoil with the horror of the sword.

The Romans set their captives to work. They also brought over a colony of Belgians, probably to direct the undertaking, as the country of this people had been fortified against the sea by embankments, similar to those the Romans designed to raise here. The Britons complained, but their masters were inflexible and in this manner we are informed those strong and enduring barriers were raised completely across the Marsh, fragments of which remain, at the present day scattered over various parts of this district. Those in the neighbourhood of Wisbech are perhaps the most considerable, and greatly attest the magnitude of the original work. These have of course much decayed by the havoc of time or the mutilation of man; but they are memorials which attach no fugitive glory to the Roman name, and will preserve its character in this country, as being really beneficial to the human race, when their prouder monuments of crime and luxury are trampled in the dust.

Whether a complete drainage and culture of the country thus defended was ever designed, remains a secret that may never be divulged by the most industrious research; but this people have left many monuments of their labor behind them, which indicate that their efforts were of no mean or servile perseverance. Along the southern boundary of the Fens an extended line of fortifications were erected, the remains of which are still discernible at Standground, Earith, Ramsey, and Willingham 'and in many places' says Mr. Wells, 'the

entire plan may be clearly traced.' Why such bulwarks were erected we are at a loss to tell; but, as their situation is along the border of the Fens, and where the rivers enter this abject district, it seems, that with the suspicious caution of conquerors, the Romans built them to keep in awe a refractory people, whom they had not yet learned to treat with the kindness and confidence of Friends. *

Besides these, the ancient drains called the Po-Dyke and Car-Dyke are attributed to the Romans. The first, which is Marshland, is nearly lost; but the Car-Dyke, between the counties of Huntingdon and Cambridge, is in a comparative state of preservation. It has been traced as far as Lincoln, and is thought by some to have extended to the Trent at Torkesey. †

This is said to be the last of the military works of this people. Tyranny and invasion the foulest crimes and the fiercest enemies, had together prostrated the

* 'These fortresses were constantly garrisoned by armed men. The stations were so near each other, that if a beacon were lighted on any one of the bulwarks, the warriors who garrisoned the next station, were able to see and to repeat the signal almost at the same instant; and the next onwards did the same; by which token they announced that some danger was impending. So that in a very short time, all the soldiers who guarded the line of wall could be assembled.'

Palgrave's England.

† 'That part of this dyke which extends from Bodsey to Horsey, is sometimes said to have been constructed by King Canute, by tradition the inhabitant of Bodsey House, whose motive for this work is reported to have had its origin in the circumstance of that monarch having been in great danger when crossing Whittlesea Mere.'

Wells' Hist. Bed. Level.

aspiring ambition of Rome. The provinces of Europe and Asia began one by one to dismember themselves from the bloated empire of the Cæsars ; and the barbarians of the north and south were beginning to feel that liberty was not confined to the mild regions of Italy, and the folds of a Roman mantle. Perhaps Britain was one of the weakest states of the empire ; but at this declining era so distant a province could only cumber the infirm state, which was daily becoming more feeble. It was therefore resolved, about the year 422, to abandon this country to its own princes, laws, and religion.

If we may be allowed to pause on the path of narrative, we would look back for one instant on these departed victors. Some conquerors have only been known to posterity by the awful guilt with which they have stained the page of history ;—the blood of their conquests, and the despotism of their rule. One of the greatest of modern historians has observed that the annals of nations is little other than a record of their crimes, their follies, and their misfortunes.* The truth of this remark seems confirmed by the scanty historical materials we have obtained from this age. The virtues of mankind appear to dazzle remembrance, while the steady gloom of their vices permits contemplation and invites search. The Romans, when the heat of conquest had passed over, turned their attention, as we have seen, to the useful arts of life. They taught their captives that man was designed for other scenes than the forest and the hunting-ground, and that there was

* Gibbon.

slumbering in the rudest bosom, those arts and those sciences which lead up to civilization and refinement; dignity and wealth. They brightened the rigid waste with agriculture, and left this Fen a flourishing province, which, on their arrival, was but a miserable salt marsh or wild fungous forest.

The Britons were left in that ambiguous state when the soul had just become tinted with the colors of polished life, though insufficient entirely to erase the rude stains of savage ignorance. This semi-barbarous condition shows human nature in perhaps its weakest and most deformed character. Without the wild resources of the barbarian, they were yet too young in arts and civilization to have recourse to the experienced artifices of refinement. We therefore find them on the one hand assailed, almost without resistance, by ferocious hordes; and, on the other, made the victims of art and policy. No sooner had the Romans departed, than the maraudings of the Picts began to assault the frail fabric of the empire. The Britons sued for succor from their departed conquerors in vain, and found it, only to destroy their liberties, in Saxon duplicity.*

* 'Long before the Saxons effected any settlement in Britain, they used to make frequent descents upon the coast, particularly that of Norfolk and Suffolk. To guard against which, the Romans not only kept a fleet cruising in these seas, but also built a chain of forts in the most convenient places which were well garrisoned. These forts were nine in number, and extended from Brancaster to Yarmouth, and thence down a considerable way along the coast; and the troop here stationed, a good part of which consisted of Cavalry, were under the command of an officer called, "The Count of the Saxon Shore," *Hist. of Lynn. Vol. 1.*

Hengist and Horsa landed on the coast, and a race of tyrants succeeded a race of generous and honorable victors. Inured to toil, piracy, and plunder, the Saxons soon gained advantages over the weak Britons. The Kingdom was quickly severed and shared among these wild and reckless Germans, of which the little portion we have to depict, fell to the share of Uffa, and the kingdom of the East Angles.

From this time the improvements which the Romans had completed, gradually decayed. Engaged in continual warfare with their encroaching lords, the inhabitants of the country had little opportunity or inclination to attend to the drainage or improvement of land; which, when secured from the invasion of the sea and wrought into fertility, might go to swell the domains of a tyrant and a stranger. Decay and desertion were the natural consequences of this agitated state of affairs, and, all the faint records we can gather intimate, that this was the period of that extensive deluge, which has left so many memorials of its devastation in every part of this Fenny country.

These evidences of the former state of the Fens have been so fully noticed at the commencement of this chapter, that no further comment seems to be here required from us. The desertion and ruin of the land has only been indistinctly and casually remarked on by the writers of this period,* so that the historian of the

* St. Guthlac, who lived about A.D. 700, describes this country as a wild uncultivated Fen, such as our resources lead us to suppose it to have been; and Palgrave in his interesting Saxon History thus notices the Fens of this period: 'Norfolk and Suffolk were almost sepa-

present day has darkness and fable to contend with, which it would be only a waste of industry to attempt to investigate; we therefore pass over a great part of this obscured epoch of our history to a more authentic and substantial period. The few facts indeed which we have related, rest in a great part upon natural conjecture, and the vague memorials that have been unconnectedly scattered over the annals of the times.

Though history is silent as to the manner and time of this land being overwhelmed by the waters, and again rescued from inundation, fertilized, and peopled; yet we have correct information that before the Saxon monarchy was destroyed in this island, the Fens were a habitable region; and that the conquerors themselves, from the great fertility of the soil, seated themselves in this province; but before we proceed further with the civil history of our subject, we would take a

rated from the rest of Britain; for a wide expanse of marshes bounded their territory towards the West; and these watery wastes being connected with each other by numerous shallow streams, in many places expanding into *meres* and *broads*, the country had nearly the appearance of a peninsula. At the isthmus where these natural defences ended, the East Anglians cast up a very strong fortification, consisting of a deep moat and a lofty rampart. In the middle ages it was often called the *Rech Dyke*, or *Giant's Dyke*: the common people attributed it to the fiend. The heath through which the rampart extends, not having been subjected to cultivation, the *Devil's Dyke* is yet very entire, and is one of the most remarkable monuments of its kind. But the marshes have been drained, and Croyland and Thorney no longer rise like islands in the midst of a marshy lake; though still the nature of the Fen countries is not entirely altered; and the traveller can easily picture to himself the ancient state of the district before it was recovered from the floods.' p. 41—2.

glance at the Ecclesiastical annals. At this period Christianity having gained a preeminence over the other religions of the world, had been introduced into this country, and we think that few readers will deem the subject of little importance in the history of a province, which included, within the circumference of an hundred miles, no less than seven Diocesan Churches or Abbeys; it will besides serve to vary the monotony of a history, whose principal records and incidents are the making of an embankment, the cutting of a drain, or the exploding of a sluice.

Perhaps the introduction of Christianity into England is one of the most important periods of its history. Six hundred years of the religion of Christ had dissipated from the mind of man much of the gloom and horror of paganism. When the Romans first landed in this island, religion had assumed her most revolting and demoniac form. Encompassed with shadowy rites, she asserted her dignity by the tyrannic policy of wounds and torture, and held a gloomy empire in the breast by fearful solemnities and mystic orgies. * The Romans,

* The religion of the ancient Britons assumed the grossest character of heathen idolatry;—their sacrifices, their Druids, and their mysterious groves, threw round it a clothing of awe and pomp scarcely ever equalled.

The groves were God's first temples. Ere man learned
To hew the shaft, and lay the architrave,
And spread the roof above them,—ere he framed
The lofty vault, to gather and roll back
The sound of anthems,—in the darkling wood,

on their arrival, introduced a milder ecclesiastical sway, and after a time something of the tincture and toleration of the apostolic faith began to be propagated; * but in the age at which we have now arrived, the greatest alteration was to be effected. Christianity had arisen triumphant and spotless above innumerable persecutions, and was fast awakening the nations of Europe. Rome, that eternal centre of the pomps and vanities of human kind, from being the first temporal city of the earth, had arisen to the first spiritual dignity in the world's kingdoms; her apostles were penetrating every known region, and disseminating from the snows of the north to the deserts of Nubia the cheering truths of a religion, which afterwards gave her power more enduring and extraordinary than the weight of empire, which had just fallen from her. Some of her missionaries had pierced with their zeal the sturdy nature of the English Saxons, and Ethelbert of Kent, the most influential monarch of the island, boldly built temples and celebrated the worship of the one true God. He founded a church at Ely, dedicated to the virgin Mary, and, from this time, the rigid faith of Catholicism grew daily more powerful in this country. The convent

Amidst the cool and silence, he knelt down
And offered to the mightiest, solemn thanks
And supplication.

Bryant.

* It appears from Gildas, one of the most ancient of the British Historians, who lived in the Sixth Century, that Christianity began to be preached in England in the year 60 A. D.; but we must admit such solitary testimony with caution.

teemed with votaries, and ecclesiastical edifices multiplied daily. The Isle of Ely especially, from its peculiar situation offered advantages to the religious enthusiast which were not likely to be overlooked; for it was a material principle of this pure religion to divest itself as much as possible of the world by which it was surrounded, to stand apart from the bustle of life and the fever of society, to sacrifice all the cheerful pleasures of existence in the immuring solitude of cells and convents; and by frequent prayer and confession to humble themselves before God. These austerities this insular country particularly favored, by its loneliness and wildness, while bread, fish, and water being the principal food of the early monks, was probably another reason for their choice of this country as a residence. Fish, from the superfluity of water, could be procured with little labor or expence, while the seclusive nature of the country, with the rigid severities which the Monks practised on themselves gave, as we have before intimated, a color of real devotion to the lives of these primitive Christians.

The humbleness of the Romish Church in its first ages of existence, is finely contrasted with the arrogance and pomp of its lamentable decline. The Benedictine order of Friars, which was by far the most numerous sect, practised austerities and privations of the most exaggerated kind, which it was either the folly or the ignorance of man, to regard with reverence, and deem the outward confirmations of a spirit, purified from the grossness and weakness of mortality. Seven times in the course of twenty-four hours the Monks assembled to prayers. None were allowed to converse

at their meals, for the Scriptures were at those times continually read. Their sleep was only sufficient for refreshing the body for new austerities. Their beds were hard, and they were not allowed to change their dress when they retired to rest.

It can be no wonder to a reflecting person that regulations so strictly enjoined should gain for their victims a character of sanctity from the ignorant and unthinking. So cunningly did the Priest suit all his extravagance to the passions of the multitude, that the authority of the Church was seldom or ever called in question, and its smile or its frown became the messenger of destiny. Monasteries multiplied in the land, and even kings and nobles sought the seclusion they offered from life, and the regard they at the same time gained from man. Never, we may safely assert, was there a firmer or more unyielding chain twined around the reason of humanity, than that which the enthusiasm and craft of the Romish priesthood rivetted in the very soul of man.

Wild in desire, and untamed in passion, he became childlike and yielding beneath the frowns of the church;—the same being who ruled the fortunes of thousands by his will, wept, and knelt, and supplicated at the chidings of his priest. Neither wealth nor dominion were able to counteract the influence of superstition, and he who could defy nations in the conflict, gave himself up to unmanly despair when the mitre and the crosier were lifted against him.

This was the age of ecclesiastical architecture over the whole Kingdom, and the monasteries of Ely, Crowland, Thorney, Spiney, Denny, Ramsey, and

Peterborough arose successively among these wild moors. The connexion of Ely with the Fens will oblige us from time to time to speak somewhat lengthily on its history ; but as it would not be within the immediate province of our work to go into a detailed account of all the monasteries we have named, we shall content ourselves with casually noticing the latter.

Tradition states that in the middle of the seventh century, Etheldreda, daughter of the Queen of the East Angles, had the Isle of Ely given her as a marriage portion on her nuptials with Tonbert, Prince of the South Gryvii. The Princess it appears was of a religious and thoughtful disposition, preferring a seclusion from the world to the pomps and submissions it was ready to pay to her exalted dignity. She therefore chose the Isle for a residence, and this domain, on the death of her husband which followed shortly afterwards, reverted to her entirely. We are, but scantily informed of the incidents of Etheldreda's life ; but, from the records that have reached us, it appears to have partaken largely of the storm and confusion of these unsettled times. After the death of Tonbert she became the wife of Egfrid, then a Prince of Northumberland, whom she left, and again sought seclusion and retirement from life. A monastery of Scotland was her second choice : here she took the veil without the consent of her husband, who endeavored to withdraw her by force from the retreat to which she had doomed herself. She appears not to have divested herself entirely of affection for the world she had abjured, and in the conflict of love to a husband and duty to a God, the pious and noble nun wavered with a momentary indecision ; but her piety

induced her to prefer the latter; and by the advice of her Abbess she sought once more the security of the Fens. This step appears to have afforded her the shelter and repose she anticipated, as we find her afterwards erecting the Abbey, (Ely Cathedral) which to the present day towers with a conspicuous grandeur above the entire Fen, having braved the elements and intestine commotions of twelve centuries. The pious foundress conceded the whole Isle to her newly erected Church, and was made its first abbess A.D. 672.*

Before the time of Etheldreda, the inhabitants of Ely had built their houses and clustered around the foundation of Ethelbert, situated about a mile south of the present City, at a place called Cratendune. Etheldreda's Monastery, however, induced them to change their residence, and the old spot was soon deserted for the more eligible situation of the present city, while Ethelbert's foundation, which was then in a ruinous state, was suffered gradually to decay.

The foundation of this, and the other religious edifices which we have mentioned, is the only particular event that occurred between the revival of the land under the

* In the cathedral of Ely, within an iron paling, a mutilated Stone cross is still preserved; said to have been erected in the lifetime of Etheldreda, in honor of Ovin, who was entrusted by her with the government of the Isle of Ely. It was found at Haddenham many years since, and bears an inscription in Roman capitals to the following purport. "Grant, O God, thy light, [to direct him in this world] and rest, [with thee in heaven] Amen. 'The inscription' says Bentham 'may be considered as a prayer used by travellers and pilgrims at St. Ovin's cross, possibly erected in his life time, since the words are applicable to one still living.'

Saxons, and the invasion of the Danes. During the idleness of a long peace the hardy Saxons degenerated into luxurious cowardice; the martial spirit which had given them a terrible superiority in the lawless nations of these middle ages, had, by a long indulgence of power and government, decayed into effeminate pusillanimity. The stern Danes arose into strength and consequence upon their fallen fortunes. These wild warriors, nourished in a country alternately scourged by the northern storm and brightened by the southern sun, a kind of medium between the icy barrenness of the arctic regions and the luxurious climate of Italy and Spain, had united in their stern frames, the hardiness of the Russian with the warm impetuosity of the Italian. For ever roving, on sea and on land, their whole art and study was plunder and piracy.* It was deemed unmanly in the cruel ideas of this people, to die except in the conflict, and he whose bier was not stained with his blood, was degraded in the eyes of such ferocious and war-loving barbarians. England was soon discovered as a country peculiarly fitted to satisfy their dark and hostile excursions: her unguarded coasts, her impotent rulers, and her growing wealth all stimulated the avarice of the Danes.

The age of war had been succeeded by the age of religious enthusiasm, and the wealth and power of the

* Denmark, whose roving hordes in barbarous times
Fill'd the wide north with piracy and crimes,
Awed every shore, and taught their keels to sweep
O'er every sea,—the Arabs of the deep!

Montgomery's West Indies.

kingdom, was gathering together in the monasteries of the people. This the Danes soon perceived, and directing their force against those districts where the religious edifices were most numerous, this part of the country was especially made to feel the effects of their fury. About the year 870 a formidable force of barbarians advanced into Lincolnshire as far as Thrikingham, where, in one battle, three Danish Kings were slain. Fresh reinforcements, consisting of five Kings, and their subordinate chieftains, made desparate by the loss of their countrymen, poured into these Fens and Marshes. A series of victories put the country under their power, the Abbeys of Croyland, Medhamstede, Thorney, Ramsey, and Ely were despoiled of their richest ornaments, levelled with the dust, and the people indiscriminately massacred.

For nearly a century the church of Ely remained in its state of ruin and desertion; till Egbert, whose character as a King is marked by many benefactions to his country, ascended the throne. At the instigation of this prince, Ethelwold bishop of Winchester, again established monks in the Abbey of Ely, and named Brythnod, provost of Winchester, for the first Abbot. Brythnod repaired the ruin and established the church in more than its original beauty. He also endowed it with fresh lands, set forth the limits of the Isle * and

* The Isle of Ely consists of one City, three market towns, and twenty-six villages; it is divided into three hundreds, extending from the bridge of Tid St. Giles, on the north, to Upmere, below Streatham Mere on the south—a space of about 26 miles in length;—and from Abbot's Delf, near Soham, on the east, to the river Nene, below Whittlesey, on the west,—a breadth of about 25 miles.

for a perpetual evidence of the possessions belonging to his church, caused a deep ditch to be cut through the main body of the Fen, called Abbot's Delf, to remain as a boundary between the respective possessions.'*

A fact, which singularly describes the wild and bleak aspect of the Fens so late as the year 1030, occurred at this time. We are informed that King Canute and his Queen Emma resolved this year to keep the feast of purification at Ely, and that they were obliged to proceed by shipping to the city, the only way of access to the interior of this province in those days. At a further period of one hundred years later, we find the first Bishop of Ely making a road or causeway through the Fen, to prevent the constant use of boats in going from place to place, which is still called Soham Causey. From these facts we may easily conceive the broken appearance of island, marsh, and sea, which the country would assume from any considerable elevation in such a period of its history.

A curious anecdote is preserved of this prince, which may be introduced here, as the circumstance probably occurred during this religious visit. It chanced that one day while navigating the *Nenne*, near the minster of Ely, the sweet and solemn tones of the choral psalmody fell on the King's ear. The soft sound, modulated by distance, pleased him so much that he composed a ballad on the occasion, which continued long afterwards to be a favorite with the people. One stanza of the poem only remains. and we may regret that we possess no further specimens of this composition, which entitles

* Hist. of Wisbech, by Wm. Watson, Esqr. F.A.S.

Canute to rank among the royal authors of England. * Among the public works of this King in different parts of the kingdom, we must not forget to name, King's Delf, a causeway, or elevated road, raised across these marshes from Peterborough to Ramsey; thus forming a land communication between those places.

It would be going too far into the history of this agitated period to relate every minor event connected with our subject; we therefore pass over the misfortunes of the prince Wiglaf, who sought the protection of these moors from his implacable enemies, and concealed himself day after day among their unfrequented solitudes; and of Alfred, son of Etheldred, who found a release from treachery and life in the walls of Ely, during the expiring years of the Saxon monarchy, or of the reign of Edward the Confessor, who, awed by the last menaces of the Danes, sent his treasures hither for safety and protection,—and shall proceed at once to the period of the Norman conquest.

* The following is the original fragment, as preserved in the *Historia Eliensis*. It will be observed, that the alteration of two words only, converts the stanza into modern English. *Ben* for *binnen* or *within*, is still employed in the ancient Saxon dialect of modern Scotland.

‘Merrie sungen the Munches *binnen* Ely,
 ‘*Tha* Cnut, Ching, reu ther by.
 ‘Roweth Cnihtes, nær the land,
 ‘And here we thes Munches sæng.’

Or, literally modernized, thus:

‘Merrily sung the Monks within Ely,
 ‘When Canute, the King, rowed thereby.
 ‘Row my knights row near the land,
 ‘And hear we these Monkēs’ song.’

William the Conqueror, by his success at the battle of Hastings, seized upon the crown of England, though not upon the affections of the people; and the army of Harold broken and shattered on the field, had yet preserved two members, who boldly defied his wrath and power. Edwin and Morcar, Earls, and partisans of Harold's fortunes, intimated their respect for their dead master, by placing his heir Edgar Atheling upon the throne. The people awed by the power of the Norman and the threatenings of their priests, retreated from the second conflict; and the weak Edgar made submissions to the conqueror in their first interview; but the spirit of discontent was not overwhelmed, and the Isle of Ely was doomed to become conspicuous in the struggle. Thurstan, the seventh Abbot of Ely, espoused the cause of Edgar, and sheltered in this impenetrable region, all the nobles whose disaffection or influence raised the suspicions of William. Stigand, Archbishop of Canterbury; Egfrid, Abbot of St. Albans; Edelwine, Bishop of Durham; the Earls Edwin and Morcar, fled hither and resolved to defend their lives and their country against the usurper. But the most important and stern enemy of William was Hereward,* a courageous soldier who after having been banished his country, returned, and was now chosen Chief of this patriotic band.

The high spirit of the King swelled into indignation at the rebellion, and quickly marshalling his army, he

* He was the youngest son of Leofric; earl of Mercia and bore the title of Lord of Brunne. (Bourn Lincolnshire.) His valor and military talents are much celebrated by the historians of his time.

resolved, by his rigor and despatch, to suppress the delinquents at once with memorable severity. He proceeded at the head of the noblest soldiers of England and France, and halted on the outskirts of the Isle at Alrehede.* In the vain consciousness of victory, he quickly raised his ramparts and arranged his troops. At first he poured assault upon assault with the impetuosity and blind fury of a contemptuous chief, who deems his astounded foe will fall at the very clash and gleam of his arms; but the unyielding forces of Hereward sustained his shocks with comparatively small loss. The courage of man commonly degenerates when he sees nature and the enemy at once working against him. The treacherous swamps, the secret hiding places, and the intricate wildernesses of the Isle, at once awed and deterred the army of William; but as we are unacquainted with the particulars of this siege, and are only favored with its general events, it is impossible to follow the arms and actions of the combatants through their long and persevering struggle. We are however told that, after a time, the King relinquished this first assault, and was obliged to depart with the reproach of many losses and an unsuccessful expedition.

For seven years the followers of Hereward maintained their arms against the King, harrassing his troops and defying his edicts. We are not informed of the peculiar advantages enjoyed by the rebellious force; but they must have been great to have continued so long a time invulnerable to the powerful army of England. The

* Audreth of the present day, 'near which' says Dugdale 'there is a military rampire still to be seen.'

natural aspect and situation of the country was probably a great advantage; yet we must be cautious in attributing the power of keeping an indignant conqueror at bay to it alone. There was doubtless a difference between the mercenary soldiers of William and the enthusiastic followers of Hereward; between those who served a tyrant by the fear of his power and influence, and those who fought with the desperation of men who knew torture and death would be the consequence of defeat.

At length, worn out with the long struggle, William showed a willingness to come to terms with his enemy; but the haughty spirit of Hereward, spurning all concessions, knew liberty by no other symbol than the extermination of the oppressor, which he resolved to accomplish or die in the struggle. The Isle was plentifully stored with provision, and its fortifications had withstood the shocks of assault unhurt. No prospect remained but to blockade the country, and starve the rebels into submission. This lingering expedient agreed but little with the active disposition of the athletic Gaul, who, with a craft befitting his low genius, resolved on an artifice which at once dissolved the firmness of the besieged patriots. The lands and manors of the Church were, for the most part, without the bounds of the Isle, and of course under the arms and power of William. These, which even at this early period, were very considerable, he threatened to confiscate and portion among his soldiers. The avaricious monks trembled at a threat which they knew so stern a warrior would feel little compunction in executing to its utmost limits. They privately consulted together,

and on a restoration of their lands and manors, agreed not only to give up the Isle but also to pay a tribute of 1000 marks as a reparation for their obstinate resistance.

These treacherous proceedings were unknown to Hereward, who, on learning the guilty transactions, knew no bounds to his indignation. In the fury of his passion he threatened to set fire to the Church and Town of Ely, and was only deterred from this rigorous step by the earnest and servile intercessions of the monks. Though thus unwarily defeated, his open spirit remained as fierce and disenthralled as ever. He retired in disgust from the Isle, still refusing to acknowledge the supremacy of William, and it is remarkable that though this brave patriot continued through life to despise the Norman government, he escaped the vengeance of the King and died a natural death. Not so his unhappy associates. Every artifice of refined cruelty and dastardly revenge was exercised upon victims, who had so long and so completely set at defiance the proud spirit of the Conqueror; but, as the disclosure of the dark pictures of bloody inhumanity is commonly revolting to any feelings except those of the perpetrator, we will not enter into the long catalogue of crime which could be here presented, and shall only generally observe, that some had their eyes put out, some their hands cut off, and some were thrown into the various prisons of the kingdom; and that among the rest, the Bishop of Durham; who had excommunicated the King, was thus confined and starved to death.

The resistance of the Isle had given it an importance by no means agreeable to the sordid policy of the Norman, and his first acts after obtaining possession of

the country showed the suspicion with which he regarded it. He sent a force of forty soldiers to Ely* whom he compelled the Abbot to maintain and pay, for the purpose of watching over the southern parts and he built a castle at WISBECH to awe and overlook the northern divisions.

A dull and uninteresting period follows this memorable siege; but we may consider that the reigns of William Rufus and Henry the 1st. were advantageous, if not to the tranquility, at least to the cultivation of the Fens; since Henry of Huntingdon, who lived in the reign of the succeeding monarch, Stephen, describes them as pleasant and fertile, mentioning their lakes, woods, islands and beautiful rivers; whilst William of Malmesbury, of the same period, pictures the country

* This circumstance was commemorated by an ancient painting to be seen in the deanery, known as *Tabula Eliensis*. There are few pieces of English antiquity that have afforded more amusement to the curious, than the representation given to certain knights and monks of Ely in this painting; several copies have been published—one is at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford; and in Bentham's *Ely*, p. 106, is a representation of this *Tabula*. It appears that the knights and gentlemen there represented were some of the principal officers in William's army, and of families making the greatest figure at that time, their descendants still bearing the same arms. The difficulty is to determine at what time these arms were first put up in the common hall of the monastery. It was usual with the King to quarter his soldiers on the monasteries in many places in the kingdom, before knights' service was fixed: on William taking the Isle by force, he went to the monastery, and the abbot and the monks being under his displeasure, he placed therein a sufficient number of soldiers to keep the monks in awe, and afterwards the monastery was fixed by the knights' service to find forty soldiers.

Watson's Hist. of Wisbech.

around Thorney in the most enthusiastic strain of eulogy. He represents it as a paradise, resembling heaven itself in beauty, and abounding with trees 'whose length without knots, do emulate the stars.' A level grass plain alluring to the eye, flourishing apple trees, vines 'which either spread upon the ground or are raised up with poles' and beautiful buildings 'which it is wonderful to see' make up his florid picture. We must not suppose this high coloring to be entirely without foundation: probably the Kings we have named remembering the stern defiance, which Hereward was enabled to oppose to the authority of their father by reason of the uncultivated nature of the country, were anxious to bring its wildernesses into as improved a state as possible, and thus, in some measure, assimilate it to the other counties of England, and make it at the same time as dependent on the monarchial power.

During the reigns of Henry 2nd and Richard the 1st, the same dull void occurs, and we only pause in the calamitous reign of John to notice its closing scene. This refractory prince, scorned by his subjects, and in arms against his barons, had taken up his abode at Lynn, in acknowledgement of its fidelity during these his last days of extravagance and misfortune. His mean spirit, which could lean to the most abject vassalage in the moment of peril, derided every treaty when the power that extorted it was removed. Twice had he thus made the most solemn professions of liberty to his subjects, and as often violated them. His barons flew to arms, resolving with one blow to exterminate their freedom or their King. Terrified by the menace of a nation, this weak monarch departed from Lynn to join his army in

the interior of the kingdom, taking with him his regalia, and most valuable treasures, but his unhappy fortune still pursued him. Whilst passing over the Wash at the Cross Keys, or, as the more general opinion seems to fix it, at Wisbech, the tide suddenly overtook him. * The swelling waters and the distant land caused his followers gradually to abandon their burdens and seek their own safety. Carriages, treasure, baggage, and regalia were indiscriminately lost; but the King's life, thus untimely spared, was only a protraction of despair, since he died a few days after at Newark, some say of poison; but the general opinion attributes it to the chagrin caused by the losses he sustained from this memorable calamity.†

The reign of Henry the 3rd, the son of John, was marked by another, the last considerable inundation by which these Fens have been overwhelmed. The works of art, by counteracting those of nature had, at this time, reduced the Fens to their lowest state. Before

* 'Matthew Paris, who died in 1259, makes King John lose his baggage in crossing the river Nene. There is a house at some distance below Sutton Washway, which still bears the name of King John's House, and tradition says he crossed there.' *Watson*. See *Hume's England*, Vol. 1. p. 97. (Edinburgh Ed. 1818.)

† During the reign of this Prince it appears the Isle was again made the scene of refuge and war. In *Holinshed* we find the following information 'Divers knights, ladies and gentlemen fled out of the towns, and withdrew into the Isle of Ely, when the army of King John followed and besieged them, and by reason of the waters in the Fens and ditches being frozen, they found means to enter, and spoiled it from side to side, together with the Cathedral Church, carrying from thence on their departure a marvellous great prey of goods and chattels.'

the embankments of the Romans, it is supposed that the waters, accumulated by the winter rains, formed for themselves natural channels in the land, and drew off with little difficulty to the ocean. When, on the contrary, embankments were stretched across the marsh, these natural channels were of course made to connect with one grand branch, through which the whole impetuous flood was left to make its way. This could only be effected by degrees, and the water which in its natural course drained off in a few days, now probably occupied weeks in getting entirely free from the soil. When nature is thwarted she commonly retrogrades to her lowest state before she again returns to improvement. The water thus gathered over the land in time deposited its sillage, covered the surface with moor, and encouraged the growth of reed and other aquatic plants, whose thick masses served still more forcibly to impede the drainage, till after a time the outfall of Wisbech, by far the most important in those days, thickened and clogged up, thus closing the only channel and outlet to the sea. An inundation would of course be the consequence of this cessation of outfall, and by these means the deluge of this age is supposed to have originated.

The Isle was again in the reign of this King seized by the disaffected barons and fortified. It was however speedily retaken by Prince Edward, and its future History degenerates into a dull record of drainage, and embankment. The land which had so long remained waste and overwhelmed with waters, serving as a retreat and defence to all whom their crimes or their principles made obnoxious to the government, was now thought

too extensive a province to lie utterly useless in a country whose accumulating population demanded its aid. In the reign of Edward 1st. the important question of drainage was first agitated. Commissions from the crown were, at various times, issued, and courts of sewers were summoned, to consider the best means of draining and improving the country; but nothing of general utility appears to have been done, or, seriously designed, until the reign of Elizabeth. John of Gaunt, fourth Son of Edward 3rd, is said to have contemplated the improvement of the Fens; but exile and death put a period to his expectations; and Gilbert Haltoft, in 1438, procured a commission for draining and settling the part of the Fens in the neighbourhood of Outwell. The person however, whose works were the first decided benefit to this country and particularly to Wisbech, was Bishop Morton. He planned and executed the Leam, which crosses the northern part of the great Level from Guyhirn to Standground, which he afterwards continued to Wisbech. * Its purpose was to accelerate the outfall of the waters of the Nene, by preventing them from taking the circuitous round of Whittlesea, Ramsey, and March, in their way to the sea below Wisbech. The Bishop appears to have well considered the importance of his work and to have superintended its execution with diligence. For the purpose of more

* 'Bishop Morton unfortunately' says Mr. Wells, 'introduced the system of straight cuts and artificial rivers, a system which was never afterwards abandoned and which we find to have been productive in aftertimes of the most fearful consequences.' *Hist. Bed. Lev.* Vol. 1. p. 73.

effectually overlooking the workmen, he built a stone tower at Guyhirn, from which he could survey their operations far over the level. This work though of benefit to the communication of Wisbech with the interior counties of England, failed in its first design of drainage, from its shallowness and was suffered gradually to decay. Cole however in his interesting manuscript, observes that for a time it improved the outfall, and that the current of water at Wisbech was so great as to endanger a boat passing under the bridge. The worthy prelate planned other works, which, if completed, would, there is little doubt, have proved highly beneficial to the country; but the wars of the houses of York and Lancaster kept the nation in such a state of great tumult and excitement, that these local improvements were finally abandoned, and nothing from this time to the Reformation is mentioned relating to our subject; and then the only record is the painful one of deluge and neglected wildness; caused, it is thought, by the omission of cleansing the drains and canals.*

* 'Bishop Morton was a man of great abilities, firmly attached to the interests of Edward 4th, and negotiated the marriage between Henry, Earl of Richmond, afterwards Henry the seventh; and Elizabeth, eldest daughter of Edward 4th, and thus provided for the future tranquility of the kingdom, by making a coalition of the divided houses (York and Lancaster.) In 1487 he was made Lord high Chancellor of England.' *Watson's Hist: Wisbech*. In which work we also find the following anecdote 'When the Duke of Buckingham resolved to assist in deposing King Richard 3rd, and to prefer the Earl of Richmond to the crown, Bishop Morton, who was then confined in Brecknock Castle, was consulted, when he told the Duke, "that if he was in his Isle of Ely, and had but four days warning, he little regarded the malice of King Richard, his countrie was so strong."

The eighth Henry ascended the throne at a period more open to tyranny, than any which went before or succeeded it. Guided by venal counsellors and an inhuman disposition, the King took every advantage of the passive submission of his subjects. Exhausted by a long and fatal war, the energies of the nation seemed to ask for repose, and the people were willing to indulge the petty extravagancies of an imperial madman, rather than rise up and again perpetrate the fearful scenes, which had disgraced its history from 1455 to 1485. At this period, from the unnatural source of the wounded pride of one man, arose the Reformation. We have in this compilation nothing to do with the domestic tyranny of Henry, or with the events which gradually led him to exterminate a religion, venerable with the experience of fourteen hundred years; but among the seven abbeys which adorned this region, the sudden overwhelming of their power, their institutions, and their protection may be conceived to have been attended with some commotion, and resistance. Leaving the particulars of these events to a more minute history, we have only to observe that the Abbeys of Ely and Peterborough were erected into Cathedrals; while the other monasteries of Ramsey, Thorney, Crowland, &c. were stripped of their power, and their lands confiscated.

The short reign of Edward 6th, and the agitated period of the dynasty of Mary, have left little for our consideration. Ineffectual attempts at drainage were made in the time of Elizabeth, and, as we before intimated, the state of the Fens were, during her reign, for the first time seriously taken into consideration. A commission headed by the ancestors the Fitz-william,

Cecil, and Montagu families, which had for its object the drainage of a part of the North Level was issued; but nothing of permanent benefit was effected, and a few years later (1600) an act was passed for the drainage of all the waste lands in England. On the accession of James the interest excited by this waste was not suffered to droop. The district of Waldersey, of about 6000 acres, took the lead in drainage. The King engaged actively in the proceedings; he even offered to drain the country himself for a remuneration of 10,000 acres, and Cornelius Vermuyden, a Dutchman, was invited over to superintend the works. With him a colony of foreigners emigrated to this inhospitable province, as a refuge from religious persecution; for the massacre of St. Bartholomew had cast its eternal stain on the French History of 1572, and the doctrines of Calvin were, by persecution and death, endeavouring to infuse piety into the hearts of the inhabitants of the low countries. It was part of these people that accompanied Vermuyden, who, coming from a country similarly situated to these Fens, were peculiarly fitted to direct and engage in the stupendous works, then in contemplation. The opportunity was however suffered to pass by. Involved in political troubles the King at length relinquished his Fen undertakings, and nothing was effected until the time of his unfortunate son, Charles 1st.

It is not our intention to go minutely into all the complex and litigious proceedings which marked the rescuing of this Fen from its waters; we shall only go cursorily over its general particulars and most important changes; of which perhaps the greatest was now generating. A meeting of Commissioners at Lynn in 1630,

made a contract with Sir Cornelius Vermuyden for draining the Great Level; for which the Contractor was to receive 95,000 acres. A clamour was raised against him, as being a foreigner, and the work was finally given up to Francis, Earl of Bedford.* The contract was called the Lynn Law, and the following are the leading terms of the agreement. The earl was to have

* We cannot resist the pleasure of giving the following extract from Wells's Hist. of the Fens. We hope however, so high a testimonial has other origin than interest and flattery. 'The application to the Earl of Bedford was both wise and politic. He was a man of a noble and finely gifted mind; he stood high in the councils of his sovereign; was the owner of extensive Fen possessions; and, above all, was the friend and neighbour of the Fenmen. A more striking instance of self devotion to the wishes of the people and the real benefit of the state, appears not upon the records of history. The call of country is magic to a patriot's ears, it is heard only to be obeyed. The Earl of Bedford saw before him the brightest prospects. Hope dawned over a dreary waste: and in the ardor of his imagination, he beheld a new world arise, to crown his efforts, and enable him to deserve from posterity a monument of increasing gratitude and admiration. Alas! human hopes and expectations are too often futile, and are sometimes ultimately entombed in the grave of experience. Could the noble minded Earl of Bedford have foreseen the mortifications he was to endure, the obstacles against which he was to contend, the tremendous pecuniary sacrifice he was to make, the base ingratitude destined to be his ultimate and only public reward, while his last hours were to be embittered by the most poignant domestic affliction, his generous spirit would have quailed, his righteous purposes would have paused upon the threshold of hope, and the great work of drainage have fallen either into the hands of an alien and adventurer, or been procrastinated until, in aftertimes, Providence should raise up to the succor and support of the Fenmen, a patron and a benefactor, as noble and disinterested as the illustrious Francis Earl of Bedford.' Vol. 1, p. 106—7.

95,000 acres or a third part of the drained land, as his remuneration for expence and hazard, of which 40,000 acres were to be appropriated for continuing and preserving the work, and 12,000 allotted to the Crown. The Earl had gained thirteen other persons to participate with him in the chances of the undertaking, and proceedings were vigorously begun. The land was divided into 20 lots of 4000 acres each, the most considerable and important drains of these Fens were immediately commenced, and Bedford River, Sam's Cut, Bevil's Leam, and Peakirk Drain, were amongst these earliest works; the royal favor shone on the Adventurers, in 1634 a charta of incorporation was granted to them, and in 1637 the Commissioners voted the drainage complete according to provisions of the Lynn Law. No sooner was this accomplished than a sudden reversion of sentiment occurred in the King's mind, which at once deranged the operations of the Adventurers. The proceedings of the Earl of Bedford became unaccountably obnoxious to him, and after obtaining a commission to declare the works of this nobleman and his colleagues incomplete, Charles tendered his own services, and actually began several works in aid of the drainage.* The sad reverses of a civil war at once put an end to these royal undertakings. The frowns of a kingdom were cast upon the unhappy King, who marshalling his

* A bank on the S. side of Morton's Leam, extending from Peterborough to Wisbech; and a new river about two miles long between the Horse-shoe and the sea below Wisbech, were a part of these works. It is said to have been his intention to erect a palace on an eminence at Manea, and to have changed the name of that place to Charlemont.

disaffected armies, and flying from place to place, in vain attempted to elude the indignities and death of a malefactor. Whilst the kingdom was thus torn and tortured with anarchy, the works which had been executed in the Fens were suffered to decay; the drains choked up, the moors grew wild, and the waters again strove for the ascendancy.

During these commotions Francis, Earl of Bedford, died, and his son William succeeded at once to his virtues and his title. The drainage of the Fens was again brought under the notice of Parliament, an act of singular importance and privilege was passed, the young Earl generously became a principal partaker of the risks of the works, a treaty was concluded with Sir Cornelius Vermuyden, and operations of the utmost importance were immediately commenced. A catalogue of the various banks, sluices, and drains, effected at this time would go to enumerate the most considerable works, that have been executed for the Fen drainage from that time to the present. At the end of four years in 1658, during the short period of the Commonwealth, the Adventurers, Participants, and Company, as the Association was significantly and discriminately called, saw their engagements complete, and were adjudged their reward accordingly. A day of rejoicing was held and thanksgiving offered up in Ely Cathedral for the completion of their arduous and lingering undertaking which from its commencement by Francis, Earl of Bedford, had consumed twenty years; and employed the labors of English, French, Scotch and Dutch, during this long period.

From this time to the death of Cromwell and during

some years of the reign of Charles 2nd, the exertions of the Associations seem to have rested. They were however again excited by the refractory conduct of the Fen men. These boors were ever averse to the improvement and drainage of their wretched country, and, under the pretence of aversion to foreigners, several times loudly expressed their disrelish for the measures which were in operation. In 1657, their untoward aversion broke into rebellion; they proceeded to demolish the works of the Adventurers, and it was only by a special proclamation from the King, that they were deterred and kept in awe.

The Association—for by such name we combine the Adventurers, the Participants and the Company—now (1663) reposed after their success, and the act was passed, which to the present day, regulates this meritorious unity of men. By this act a Corporation is constituted for governing the Level, consisting of one governor, six bailiffs, twenty conservators, and commonalty; and all the various powers and limits of the Association are set forth.

At the consummation of such a work, we would cast our eye in review, for a few moments, over its history; and sum up our observation with a few general remarks. Our first prospect was the cheerless scene of a region overspread with the weeds of nature, drowned in continual floods, inhospitable to man, and only known in parts to the wild birds of the sky, and the shapeless forms of the wave. We saw it afterwards partly covered with habitations and population, though separated from the world by bleak surfaces of water, and represented as the haunt of the outlaw and the freebooter.

The patriots of Hereward ennobled its desolation; and we suddenly perceived it rise with picturesque beauty in the antiquated description of William of Malmsbury. In the reign of Henry the 8d, we again found it smothered in the deluge, and abandoned to nature. It was then that the voice of adventure and regeneration was first heard. After years of alternate debate and neglect: speculation and exertion: the sacrifice of wealth and the waste of labor, we have beheld at last a bold company of men subduing by degrees its comfortless aspect, and lifting it as it were into sunshine and culture, till it has become an open province, so intersected with drains and canals that we may confidently assert that the waters will never again get the ascendancy till another race of boors and barbarians shall infest this country and the works of art and improvement sink into insignificance and ruin.*

* Goldsmith has written with his unequalled concentration, ease and truth in a few lines on Holland; which apply with like beauty and life to this waste.

To men of other minds my fancy flies,
Embosomed in the deep where Holland lies.
Methinks her patient sons before me stand,
Where the broad ocean leans against the land;
And sedulous to stop the coming tide,
Lift the tall rampire's artificial pride.
Onward methinks, and diligently slow,
The firm connected bulwark seems to grow,
Spreads its long arms amidst the watery roar,
Scoops out an empire and usurps the shore;
While the pent ocean rising o'er the pile,
Sees an amphibious world beneath him smile;

The Level thus reclaimed speedily increased in importance. In 1697 the Bedford Level Corporation divided it into three districts, viz. the Middle, South, and North Levels. The Middle Level extends from Morton's Leam, North; to the Old Bedford River, South; with Huntingdonshire and Marshland for its western and eastern boundaries, including about 120,000 acres: the South Level extends from that of the North to the Upland country, including about 173,000 acres: and the North Level from Morton's Leam to the river Welland, containing about 48,000 acres. This separation of territory produced a separation of interest, and the improvements of one portion became no longer common to the rest.

It requires the aid of experience before man is able to bring his works to any considerable degree of perfection. Though such care and judgment had been employed in the works of drainage, they were yet far from answering every view of the Association. The waters of the Level were not discharged by the Ouse outfall at Lynn so swiftly as anticipated, and, in 1720, Mr. Kinderley gave his opinion that the great bar or impediment to the outlet of the waters was the wide, crooked, and shallow channel made by the river Ouse near its mouth, in passing from St. Germain's to Lynn; which could only be remedied by making a straight cut across the whole extent of the bend. This plan however was violently

The slow canal, the yellow-blossom'd vale,
The willow-tufted bank, the gliding sail,
The crowded mart, the cultivated plain,
A new creation rescued from his reign.

Traveller.

opposed, and, at length, rejected; when the Bedford Level Corporation, with other landed proprietors, united for the purpose of cleansing and deepening the channels of the Nene, where it fell into the Ouse at Salter's Lode, hoping that the outfall might be made efficient by the greater scouring force of the water. This however failed, and the son of Mr. Kinderley above-mentioned now ventured again to bring forward the previously suggested proposition of a cut. The opposition which first greeted this proposal was not subdued, and the inhabitants of Lynn still persisted in treating it as a scheme which would be most injurious. The delay of a hundred years was scarcely sufficient to mature the plans and silence the litigations of those, who, for a temporary interest, were opposed to this measure. In 1792, seventy two years from its first proposal, the scheme began to gather interest and support; meetings were more frequently held; and vast majorities declared a cut, which was afterwards called the Eau Brink Cut, as the only probable method of perfecting the drainage. In 1795, plans were so far matured that an act for the work was passed, but operations were still neglected. Another act was passed in 1804, and it required the aid of five other acts, for amending and enlarging their powers and provisions, before active measures were commenced. In 1819, ninety nine years from its first proposal by Mr. Kinderley, the excavation was begun, and in two years the work was completed, having altogether cost upwards of £300,000, though estimated at only £80,000.

The Ouse outfall being thus in a great measure perfected, the outfall of the Nene, which is the outlet for

the waters of the North Level, began suddenly afterwards to engage general attention. The Adventurers of the Level drainage, in their efforts for the improvement of this work, two centuries previously (1616) scoured out Morton's Leam, and deepened it. This proved still ineffectual and the Level was subject to casual inundation: a storm or a rainy season still for a time laid it under water. The Adventurers therefore resolved at length to abandon Morton's Leam, and to make another in the same wash of sufficient depth to carry off the waters. This new Cut was executed in 1728, by Thomas Smith a Conservator of the Bedford Level, at the expence of that Corporation and it is still generally known by the old name of Morton's Leam. It was much more important and successful than that from which it derived its name; still a great part of the waters made their way through the Whittlesey, Ugg, and Ramsey Meres to the river Ouse.

About the time of Mr. Kinderley's first proposition of the Eau Brink, he also suggested another Cut below Wisbech, for the purpose of turning the channel of the Nene into the North Level outlet, at Gunthorpe Sluice; thus preventing it straying in the casual and shifting sands which obstructed it at its mouth. This the inhabitants of Wisbech strongly opposed, erroneously apprehending that the tides of the river would be considerably impeded by it, and they caused the works, erected for the execution of the Cut, to be demolished, and afterwards effectually stopped their process by an injunction from the Court of Chancery.

This work was again agitated in 1770. The sluggish outfall of the Nene had been found exceedingly pre-

judicial to the works of the Bedford Level drainage. In 1763 the north bank of the Wash, through which Morton's Leam runs, broke from the fearful height and violence of a flood, which drowned a considerable extent of the Level, and destroyed much of the property upon it. This devastation was renewed by partial breaches of the banks in 1765, and 1767; and, in 1770, a violent inundation occurred, the whole country to the extent of several miles was overflowed to the depth of nearly six feet and many of the inhabitants and cattle fell victims to the flood. Such repeated deluges must have greatly injured the land of the Level and have kept its cultivators in perpetual alarm. In the following year (1771) it appears that parliament was applied to, and an act was passed for the maintenance of the works of this district, instituting a Committee of eighteen persons to watch over their preservation, to be annually chosen from the Committee of the five districts, and to be named the 'Committee of Works.'*

These continued floods and the constant damage which they occasioned had, as we have observed, again roused the scheme of a Cut through the salt marsh of Tid St. Giles to Gunthorpe Sluice; for it was evident that these floods were caused by the winding and slow outfall of the Nene, as it wound among the precarious sands at its entrance into the sea. The Commission of Sewers for the hundred of Wisbech, and the Corporation of that town, still however strenuously opposed the plan. At last, in 1773, the Bedford Level Corporation,

* The expence of keeping the Morton's Leam bank in repair from this period (1770) to 1796 was upwards of £20,000.

and that of Wisbech came to terms, and an amicable arrangement being effected between them, an act was immediately passed for the work, which authorized the Commissioners of the North Level to make the Cut, and provided that vessels navigating between Wisbech and the sea, should have the free use of it. This work which had been so dreaded by the Wisbech Corporation, was, as is frequently the case, found to be attended with the most satisfactory effect upon the navigation of the river, which before this time, had greatly decayed. The Cut extends about a mile and a half in length, commencing at a bend of the river called River's End, and terminating at Gunthorpe Sluice.

Plans and operations were now suffered to rest, and a period of nearly forty years elapsed before other projects for the improvement of this outfall, were seriously designed. At last, in 1813, Mr. Rennie again excited speculation, by proposing a Cut from the point where that of Kinderley terminates to Crabb Hole, a distance of nearly four miles, extending into the bay or projection of sea, called the Wash, through high sands and green marshes. The arguments by which he supported his proposed improvement was, that there was a fall at low water, from Sutton Wash to Crabb Hole, of twelve feet; that the outfall of the river below Gunthorpe Sluice, was in a bad state, owing to the shifting sands; and that the great bar to the uninterrupted discharge of the Nene waters, and of course to the general drainage of the lands depending on the river, was the high and unstable sands between Gunthorpe Sluice and Crabb Hole, and the narrow and confined channel of the river, through the town of Wisbech.

The estimated expense for this and the Cut to Crabb Hole was upwards of £600,000, a sum so great that all parties, however sanguine as to the benefit that would attend the accomplishment of such a work, shrunk from loading the lands with so enormous an expense, and it lay a mere conjectural speculation till 1818, when Lord William Bentinck stood forward as an advocate for the improvement of this part of the kingdom; but his more distinct object was the erecting of a bridge and forming an embankment over the Nene, at a point as near the sea as possible, and thus directly connecting Norfolk and Lincolnshire.

The Corporation of Wisbech regarded this plan with as much hostility as they had formerly shown to Kinderley's Cut. They were of opinion that the trade of the town and the navigation of the river would greatly suffer by it, and no effort was wanting on their part to frustrate the measures. The promoters of the Bridge Scheme, being aware of the importance of Mr. Rennie's Cut, delayed the progress of their work for some time, hoping that the landed proprietors would co-operate with them. In 1819 a second report of Mr. Rennie was made, which gained more attention than the former one, principally from the fact, which had previously escaped particular notice, that there was 13 Feet fall between Gunthorpe Sluice and Crabb Hole, viz. 12 inches fall between the Sluice and Sutton Wash, (about 2 miles) and 12 feet fall between the Wash and Crabb Hole (about $3\frac{1}{4}$ miles.)

These circumstances induced the projectors to call another meeting, and in 1820 a numerous assembly at Wisbech declared that Mr. Rennie's plan appeared to

indicate the most effectual means of improving the drainage and navigation of the river, and it directed that gentleman to estimate the probable expence of the cut; which he named at about £177,000. The projectors declared the work at this sum to be practicable; but the other measure of the Cut between Leverington and Wisbech it was thought would effect the interest of Wisbech so much that it would be better not altogether to rely on Mr. Rennie's representations, and the opinion of Mr. Telford was therefore obtained on the subject; but his idea did not mainly differ from that of the former gentleman. He suggested that instead of taking one Cut from the Horse-Shoe to Rummer's Mill, two should be made; one about half a mile long to avoid the bend made by the river in passing through the town; and the other through the point of land at the Horse-Shoe: removing Wisbech Bridge and deepening the channel were subordinate propositions, the estimate of the whole scheme was £80,000.

During the following summer the plans were gradually matured, and £400,000 was proposed to be raised for the completion of the whole of the works by a tax upon the lands and by tonnage on the shipping. The unpropitious harvest of this year however so impoverished the farmer, that it was thought expedient by the Corporation and inhabitants of Wisbech, to suspend the measure until a more favorable opportunity, as the landed proprietors had already sustained a considerable burden in promoting objects of drainage; and the losses which they had lately borne in their agricultural occupations, but little reconciled them to the prospect of an additional speculative tax. The inhabitants of

Peterborough, who expected to reap considerable commercial advantages by the measure, were less cautious. They boldly called a meeting and directed the preparation of the Act of Parliament which was to acknowledge and legalize the scheme; but the inhabitants of Wisbech still protested against the resolution, and finally stopped the proceedings.

A wet season again deranged the measures. The outfall gradually improved with continually scouring waters, and the navigation at the conclusion of the year, presented so promising an appearance that further alteration or improvement were for a short time forgotten. Disheartened by perpetual delays and despairing of ever uniting the outfall scheme with that of the Bridge, Lord Bentinck and his associates revived the latter as a separate measure, though still they expressed their willingness to come to any terms which Messrs. Telford, and Rennie might propose for extending the river to Crabb Hole.

The plan for the erection of the Bridge without any alteration or improvement in the river was jealously received by the inhabitants of Wisbech, who were well aware that though the outfall had been naturally improved by the peculiarity of the season, the building of a Bridge in the proposed situation would not only delay or completely stop vessels from venturing to the port, by the violent force with which it was anticipated the waters would rush under the Bridge; but that it would also detain a considerable flow of tide from the town. This opinion was confirmed on their consulting another engineer, Mr. Chapman, who stated that the Bridge would be most disadvantageous to Wisbech,

unless the discharge of all the land waters could be carried beyond the mouth of the estuary. This again awakened speculation to devise means to stop, or at least diminish, the injurious effects foreboded. The plan of the Bridge was laid before the Corporation of Wisbech, and it has always been a great cause of regret amongst the merchants and masters of vessels frequenting the port that they should have sanctioned its present position; which has been found to be in the greatest degree dangerous to navigation, so much so as very frequently to deter vessels coming to Wisbech, if they can be supplied with cargoes for other ports. The Corporation are however now fully aware of the importance of the subject and of the injury sustained by the present fearful construction of the Bridge and are, we understand about to adopt some effectual means to remedy this evil still so loudly and justly complained of.*

The promoters of the Bridge Scheme, the Corporation of Wisbech, and North Level Commissioners held a conference in London, and it was then decided on forming a new channel from Kinderley's Cut to Crabb Hole, and uniting it with the bridge scheme as one measure,

* The measures by which the river Nene could be brought into its most advantageous state to the town of Wisbech may be comprised in the following extract from Watson's Wisbech. 'Erasing the bend of the river below the opening of the new road leading to Peterborough, heretofore called Barton Lane; cutting a channel from the toll bar on the south side to the west end of Mr. Marriott's house; making an additional arch and giving a greater water-way to the Bridge; straightening the channel of the Horse-Shoe, by cutting through the lands on the east side of the river; and confining and deepening the channel of the Nene to the sea.

the former of which was estimated to cost £130,000. The Duke of Bedford with the North Level proprietors and those of Great Portsand, agreed to undertake the concern on £60,000 being guaranteed to them by the other parties, a proposition which after some discussion was agreed to. The proprietors of the estates, immediately adjoining the town of Wisbech, consented to contribute £30,000, one moiety of the stipulated sum; and the other was agreed to be provided by the Corporation of that Town, the latter being empowered by the act of Parliament to levy the further sum of sixpence per ton (threepence per ton having been charged by a previous act) upon all goods, and sixpence per chaldron upon all coals in vessels arriving at and leaving the port of Wisbech. The sum of £30,000 however then contributed by the Corporation has been found, by a calculation of the tonnage duties subsequently received, to have been too great a proportion; but the interests of the North Level Commissioners, and those of the Duke of Bedford were so exceedingly powerful in Parliament, that it was thought on the part of the Committee, more adviseable to accede to the terms, than raise an ineffectual opposition to the passing of the bill.

This amicable arrangement between all the parties was immediately succeeded by an act of Parliament acknowledging the measures, and operations were forthwith commenced.

The execution of the outfall Cut was entrusted to the care of Messrs. Jollife and Banks, and the work will stand for ages, not only as an object of pride to the contractors and those who brought the plan to maturity; but also to the Merchant and the Mariner, whose vessels

can now safely reach the port of Wisbech. Even the little landed proprietor will forget the trouble and anxiety which the rates for executing the plans have occasioned, in the reflexion that he was in some measure instrumental to the accomplishment of such a great and national work.

The result of this cut was signally prosperous. The whole river from Wisbech to the Sea, was now wound into nearly a straight direction; except a portion extending about three quarters of a mile through Woodhouse marsh, which was still, and had been for several years, an impediment to the outfall, and an expence to the Corporation of Wisbech. In other respects the extensive Cut, which we have been describing, was most satisfactory and complete in its results. The tide, after its opening, flowed to an unprecedented height, and ebbed lower than had ever been known; whilst the constantly scouring force of the stream proved wonderfully advantageous to the river, by removing those precarious sands which in various parts used frequently to delay the free navigation.

Nothing is perhaps more illustrative of the efficacious outfall gained by this work, than the circumstance of the Hygre having deserted the river on its opening in June 1830. While the channel remained in its confined, circuitous, and obstructed condition, it retained a considerable body of water, even at its lowest ebb. The tide, in making its way to Wisbech, was frequently delayed by these turnings and obstructions, until it had flowed a considerable height in the mouth of the river, and it was often high water there before there was any rise near the town of Wisbech. This

weight of water, pressing forward with accumulating strength, forced itself in rolling waves over the impediments, and down the narrow passes of the river, especially at the time of the equinoxes, when it came down the stream in a broad hurrying gush of water often tearing the vessels from their moorings, and sweeping onwards with alarming velocity. So uncommon a spectacle, although a subject of amusement showed, at the same time, the incompleteness of the outfall. It had probably appeared in this river from the time of its principal branch being turned into the Ouse at Salter's Lode, for we have an interesting record preserved of it in 1680, in the Diary of Ralph Thoresby * which we extract. We should almost suppose, from the manner with which this quaint author has noticed it, that it was more powerful in those days, and that consequently the channel of the river was then more obstructed, than in our time. 'This morning' says he 'before we left Wisbech, I had the sight of an Hygre or Eager, a most terrible flush of water, that came up the river with such violence that it sunk a coal vessel in the town, and such a terrible noise that all the dogs in it did snarl and bite at the rolling waves, as though they would swallow up the River, the sight of which (having never seen the like before) much affected me, each wave surmounting the other with extraordinary violence!'

These various and important measures had brought the river from Wisbech to the sea, in almost an unin-

* Vol. 1. p. 82. Thoresby was one of the most celebrated antiquarians of his age. His correspondence with the distinguished men of his times are volumes of rich interest.

interruptedly straight direction, excepting a bend, near to the Horse Shoe, referred to in Mr. Rennie's report; and another near to a place called the Woodhouse Marsh. The latter was considered such a great obstruction to the passage of vessels, that the Corporation of Wisbech were extremely anxious, if possible, to remove it and make a new excavation, in a line with the termination of Kinderley's Cut. The opinions of several local Engineers were taken, and they varied very considerably in their estimates of the expence, one stating about eight hundred pounds to be sufficient, another naming upwards of six thousand pounds as the probable cost. With this uncertainty and the impoverished state of the Corporation Funds, it is probable that the work would never have been commenced, had not a circumstance occurred in the year 1827, which held out a very powerful inducement to the Corporation. It was found, by the Parish authorities at Wisbech, exceedingly difficult to provide labour for the unemployed poor, and a conference was held between the Corporation and the Select Vestry, when it was agreed that they should jointly contribute to the expence, and the paupers were immediately set to work upon the Cut. During the years 1827, 28, and 29, their labours were continued, and the sum of £2000. was expended by the Corporation, but to little effect; the tide continually swept their works away, and all that they effected, was to give the Cut, which was afterwards completed, the name of the Paupers' Cut, which it will long retain, although not a vestige of their labour is left.

In 1830, the Corporation resolved boldly to execute

the work; but previously to entering on the undertaking, they took the opinion of Mr. Cubitt, an eminent Engineer, not only as to the utility and practicability of the work, but also as to the expence, and all the detailed operations which it was required to adopt. The estimate of this gentleman, was about £1200 including a dam across the old channel of the river, and a further annual outlay of about £300 was contemplated for two or three years subsequently, for preserving the sides with stone. The work was commenced, but unfortunately the upland waters, from a heavy fall of rain, came down with such violence to the sea, before the new channel could be sufficiently excavated to admit of its scouring force, and the bed of the old channel was so considerably deepened by it, that it was found exceedingly difficult to construct a dam across it. At length, after much anxiety on the part of the Corporation, and every exertion on the part of the men employed, the channel was excavated and the dam completed, without detaining a single vessel during the progress of the work. This however was not all that the Corporation had to contend with, they had effected a new Cut, notwithstanding all the disadvantages of a fresh water flood on one side, and high tides on the other; but the most difficult task still remained, that of retaining the Cut when executed, as the force of the tides soon began to undermine the banks, and the only remedy was to line the sides with stone, a process not easily effected, as the stone had to be procured from the quarries at Wansford, in Northamptonshire, and from Yorkshire. It is a matter of great surprise that the Engineer should in this instance, as well as that of the Nene Outfall Cut, have been

ignorant of the necessity of stone in the first instance, particularly so as it was used in the completion of Kinderley's Cut; and it leads us to reflect that although the talent of men of the present day is unrivalled in theory, yet our ancestors surpassed them in the practical department of science.

The Woodhouse Marsh Cut, as it is more properly called, altogether cost upwards of £5,000; but the Navigation of the river was materially improved, and the vessels are now enabled to arrive at Wisbech much sooner than they were previously accustomed to do. The North Level Commission followed up the completion of the Nene Outfall Cut, by cutting leading drains in the interior of the districts, all connected with the new river, as it may properly be termed. The mills hitherto used to force the water to the sea are now rendered useless, and a natural drainage completely effected. It is impossible to calculate the advantages attending on these stupendous works. The land is increasing rapidly in value, and the industry of the inhabitants is now permanently secured from the ravages of deluge.

This is the last of the works on the River Nene that we have to trace; and, indeed, concludes the History of the Fens, as far as they are relative to our subject. Throughout a period of two hundred years, from the time when Francis, Earl of Bedford, engaged in the arduous task of regenerating this hostile country, we have seen that exertion has been constantly gathering strength, consequence, and success; that it has derived new resources from adversity, and has at last given to the thronging population of England a tract of country, un-

surpassed in the richness and luxuriance of its vegetable productions. Though to the eye of the traveller the land may seem wild without variety, and extensive without sublimity, yet this will be thought by many to be counteracted by the abundant fertility of its soil, and though *we* cannot look on it otherwise than as a dreary and cheerless country, it may have charms for others superior to the grandeur of the Highlands of Scotland, or the voluptuous majesty of Italy.*

Before we take a final leave of the Fens, the rivers seem to claim some notice; we shall therefore, in as short a space as possible, name their course and extent.

Every one, who is at all acquainted with the geography of England, must have noticed the great indention of the sea or bay, which forms so conspicuous a feature on its Eastern Coast, and which is denominated by the general name of The Wash. To this bay all the rivers of the Fens make their way, and discharge themselves by three separate outfalls, at Boston, Wisbech, and Lynn. That of Wisbech was formerly the most considerable and important, but on the destructive measure of di-

* The most beautiful countries are often the most unfruitful. Switzerland produces barely sufficient for its scanty population, and much of its support is derived from the chase; yet what an association of all the grand and mighty prospects of nature are there assembled. Well to the Swiss may the soil be dear

To which his soul conforms,
And dear the hill that lifts him to the storms.

verting the waters of the Nene into those of the Ouse at Salter's Lode being completed, the outfall of Lynn became the most considerable, and has hitherto continued to be so.

The river Welland takes its rise at Sibertoft, and is supposed to derive its name from the Saxon word *Vealland*, signifying boiling or raging; a character, which however applicable to its ancient state, it no longer retains. 'After taking in some petty streamlets, the river comes at length to Market Deeping and St. James Deeping, where it enters the Fens, and burdens them with the waters of part of Northamptonshire, Leicestershire, Rutland, and Lincolnshire.' In its course it passes many gentlemen's seats, and traverses prospects of picturesque beauty before it reaches Stamford, 'whose numerous steeples and towers rise in almost collegiate grandeur to grace the entrance of Lincolnshire, and the princely pile of Burghley, appearing itself a town, in the midst of its highly ornamented territory, adorns the Northamptonshire bank.' Passing Crowland, with its majestic Abbey 'shred and sere with a thousand winters' and its eccentric bridge, it arrives at Spalding, and soon after enters the sea.

The Nene, also called the Nen and the Nine, is supposed to derive its appellation from its source being nine springs. It rises in two branches at Catesby, in Northamptonshire, and passing Northampton, Wansford, and Peterborough, enters these Fens; where it divides into several branches; one passing Standground Sluice and through Whittlesey Mere, makes its way to Ramsey and thence through March, Upwell, and Outwell to Salter's Lode, and the Ouse outfall at Lynn. Another

branch, and that more immediately connected with our History, passes Whittlesey into Moreton's Leam, and through Guyhirn to Wisbech and the Sea.

After winding among the rich meadows of Northamptonshire, and passing the county town and Wellingborough, it comes to Wansford,* and proceeds thence through the beautiful scenery and plantations that border Milton Park. Peterborough Cathedral is the last conspicuous object it passes before entering the Fens, where its sluggish and unvaried course is partly through long fields of reeds to Wisbech and the sea, presenting nothing that we can, with any pleasure, pause upon.

The Ouse, though the most extensive river, has less beauty, and passes through scenery much more uninteresting than the two preceding rivers. 'It traverses a considerable part of the midland counties of England, rising in two branches not far from Brackley, and Towcester, on the borders of Northamptonshire and Oxfordshire,' and passing through Newport-Pagnell, and Bedford, becomes navigable at Cambridge; passing on to Ely and through Lynn into the ocean, a branch passes St. Neots, Godmanchester, Hertford, St. Ives and Earith, where it unites with the artificial Bedford river, which extends in a nearly straight line quite across the country, from Earith to Welney, passing

* 'Wandsford has a long bridge connecting the North road. Of this bridge is related a romantic story, of a man having floated, in consequence of a summer flood, down the river, from the higher districts of Northamptonshire, on a haycock, on which he was sleeping, and being stopped by its arches: his surprise on awaking, and his extraordinary preservation form the interesting part of the tale.'

Wells.

the beautiful suspension bridge lately erected there.* A branch once passed from Littleport to Elm, and joined the river at Wisbech; but this is now nearly filled up.

Besides these primitive rivers of the Fens: there are many subordinate streams, such as the Lark, the lesser Ouse or Brandon river, which with the navigable drains, all serve to transport the produce of the country to the different ports of Boston, Wisbech, and Lynn.†

* In mentioning this Bridge in his History of the Bedford Level, Mr. Wells makes an erroneous statement, which we, from unquestionable authority, beg to correct. He states that 'prior to the erection of the Suspension Bridge, there was a Ferry across the Hundred-Foot River, the profits of which belonged to the Bedford Level Corporation.' This it appears was not the case. The Ferry was originally a boat, belonging to a farm, on the border of the River, through which farm the parish had a right of road; but this being at once inconvenient to the proprietor of the farm, and the parish, the former paid a compromise to get rid of it. A direct line of road was afterwards obtained by the parish, and a *Ferry established by subscription*; which was the Ferry used prior to the building of the Bridge by the Rev. W. G. Townley; who has a lease on it for 99 years, at the quit rent of 5s. the tolls of which were fixed by the Corporation.

† For an account of the ancient course of the principal rivers of the Fens, see Col. Armstrong's History of Lynn Navigation, Folio Edition, 1725. For the present course see Wells' History, from which the above sketch has been chiefly taken.

HISTORY OF WISBECH.

CHAPTER III.

Ancient History of Wisbech.

WISBECH is situated in the northern part of the county of Cambridge, at a point verging upon Norfolk ; being, on every side surrounded by the Fen lands of the Bedford Level and Marshland. The river Nene runs through the town, dividing it into two parts, and empties itself into the sea at the distance of about ten miles.

The first investigation of the local historian is commonly that of tracing the origin of the name, distinguishing the place of which he has to treat. Mankind, in their earliest condition, we are told formed a language by imitating the sounds or some peculiar property of the object they meant to describe, and this principle has continued, in some measure, to the present day. Many of our towns have thus gained their appellation, and among the rest the name of Wisbech appears to have been derived from its situation, its etymology portending it to be a town situated on the beach of the River Wys or Ouse. The Ouse formerly, our readers will remember,

made its way to the sea through this town, and *Wys* is conjectured as an ancient name of that river, which flowed up to the banks, whose remains are still an object of interest in the vicinity of the town, and therefore *beach* would very naturally apply to its shores. Some have contended, and it appears to us with greater authority, that *beach* is but a corruption of the Saxon word *bec*, (signifying water) and as it is called Wisebech in Domesday Book, and subsequently Wisebeche and Wysbeche, we have little doubt that the latter is the true derivation, and that Wisbech, as it is at present generally written, is the original name.

The art of printing, an invention of incalculable benefit to mankind, has so multiplied his resources, that the historian of a future age will never, like that of the present, have to complain of disjointed and unsatisfactory materials, whilst he is engaged in compiling the events of the past; but every thing, prior to the propagation of that art, is involved with some degree of unsurmountable perplexity. The History of this country, previous to the conquest, very often assumes the character of a wild romance; every chronicle being unsubstantial, and every record dubious. The most populous towns of the kingdom were founded during this unsettled period; but their first aspect, the date of their foundation, and the circumstances attending it, are alike unrecorded. We may be certain however that at whatever time this part of the country was peopled, and the foundation of its towns and cities laid; it was not with precipitancy; but that they proceeded from hut to cottage, from cottage to village, and from village to town, during the slow and gradual progress of years.

The foundation of Wisbech seems to us to have been laid, during those middle ages, when the savage barbarians and merciless hordes of the North, were stripping the fields of Europe, and deluging them with blood. The soldiers of Rome had, as we have before related, raised their embankments and thus limited the power of the ocean over this low and perilous part of England, and it was not likely that such people would perform a work so stupendous, so laborious, and so enduring, and then abandon the country to the desolation in which they found it. We may suppose, and our supposition is not entirely imaginary, that in some high and conspicuous parts, which then rose like islands above the level marshes, a few persons would at first fix their residences, probably the fisherman or an encampment of soldiers. The roving mauraunders of Saxony and Denmark who were distracting the Roman forces by land were not entirely ignorant of the sea, and of the fertility of these uncultivated shores, and we therefore find that before this time they had launched their boats (the mean vessels in which they sailed were worthy of no better name) and commenced their savage warfare of descent and plunder upon the coast. The Romans, to secure their possessions as much as possible, erected stations and forts at the mouths of the most important rivers, and Wisbech may have owed its origin to one of these rude defences. Such is the opinion of Dr. Stukeley the Antiquarian, and we readily yield to so high an authority. The river Nene, which was then a vast and powerful stream branching into two parts, and circulating through the heart of the kingdom in a western and southern direction, here fell

into the ocean which would be another inducement to settlement, as such a situation is for various reasons favorable to an enterprising people, or we may again suppose, with much apparent truth, that the earliest inhabitants of this town, and the country around it, consisted principally of colonists from Belgium, as we are informed that the Romans introduced these people to superintend the embankment of the country, and direct the languid efforts of the Britons in its prosecution. However this may be, we have proof of the existence of Wisbech in the time of the Saxons, for in the early part of the eleventh century it was given, with other large domains, by Oswy and Leoflede to the convent of Ely, on the admission of their son Alwyn, into that monastery. With the exception, however, of this memorial, we have nothing that throws the least light upon the character, extent, or appearance of the town, prior to the subjugation of the kingdom by William the 1st. During the reign of this monarch, we have seen that this Fen was brought more particularly into notice in consequence of its giving shelter to the disaffected nobles and their followers, and that Wisbech was distinguished from the circumstance of William having built a castle there to defend the country, and prevent the recurrence of rebellion in this suspicious and naturally fortified province.

In the History of Col. Watson, we find the date of the erection of the castle to be 1086, which is twenty years after William's usurpation of the English throne. This scarcely reconciles the fact of the surrender of the isle, and the building of the castle after a seven years' siege of the country, as history leads us to place the

rebellion immediately after the accession of the Norman Conqueror. Another author fixes the date of this castle's erection at 1071, which though perhaps nearer the truth, does not entirely clear up this historical doubt.

The survey undertaken by William, has preserved another notice of the town, and in Domesday Book it is mentioned in connexion with lands and fisheries of the Abbot of Ely, the churches of Crowland, and Ramsey, and of William de Warren. From this statement it appears, the principal property of the manor of Wisbech in those days was extensive and prolific fisheries, especially of eels. The property of the churches of Ramsey, Crowland, and of William de Warren appears to have been entirely of this kind; *rendering* (annually, we suppose) 22,000 *eels*. This sort of wealth must have been extremely valuable to the church in those days of religious abstemiousness, and may, in a great measure, favor the idea of Wisbech being in its most original state, a mere fishing village. The following is the record of the property belonging to the Abbot of Ely in this hundred, as recorded in Domesday Book.

Cambridgeshire.

Land of the Abbot of Ely, in Cestreton Hundred.

"The Abbot of Ely holds the manor of Wisbece. There are ten hides [or about 600 acres] of land, ten caracutes [or about 1,200 acres] of plough lands. In demense one hide and one yard land and there are two plough lands. There are fifteen villeins, ten of whom are to an acre; and thirteen socmen, of two hides and an half, who cannot or are not able to remove from all their eight plough lands. There are seventeen cottages and two bondsmen. The fisheries produced 1,500 eels,

ten plough lands of meadow pasture for the cattle of the town. In the whole it is and hath been valued at *one hundred shillings*; in the time of King Edward the Confessor, at £8; this manor lies and hath lain in the demesne of the church. In the same town, two fisheries did render to the Abbot 14,000 eels, and at present doth render 18s. 4d. The Abbot hath soke over all the men of the town."

This record illustrates, in some measure, the vassalage and state of dependence in which the greater mass of the people lived in the time of this monarch. Feudalism had been established by William, on the ruined fortunes of the partizans of Harold. This celebrated form of government, which, twelve centuries since, ruled nearly the whole continent of Europe, was at its first introduction, a highly beneficial and salutary means of preserving the chain of society; but, after a time, it degenerated into one of the most slavish and arbitrary systems, which have ever been corrupted by the influence of man. The feudalism of the Conqueror was of the latter character; palliated, however by many indulgences, which can alone account for its long continuance. Had there not been something conciliatory in the behaviour of the lord to his vassal, something beyond the oath of fidelity and the rod of power, we have every experience and reason to suppose, that so large and powerful a body of mankind, would have asserted their freedom, and burst the restraints that held them, long before feudalism was abolished in this country. The vassal from being the servant, became, at length, the slave of his lord, who held him as a part of his property, and exercised a dominion over his life, as

well as over his fortune. He was obliged to cultivate the estate of his master, to live on a scanty allowance, to follow him into the field, and, bearing his standard through the midst of battle, to avenge, with his blood, the peevish quarrels of a tyrant. However uncultivated man may be, the principle of liberty and the contempt of bondage ever live within his breast; for as freedom is one of the most beneficent, so it is one of the most universal gifts of nature: man can exist beneath a single ray; but he pines to death or becomes desperate with despair if its light entirely fade.

The brave and hardy spirit, exhibited in those days, was invigorated by a frequent and unostentatious intercourse, between the baron and the vassal. The dependence of the inferior, was alleviated by the encouragement, given by the lord to those sports and pastimes, which formed so prominent a characteristic of those days; and whose happy influence over the mind was of the gentlest and most subduing kind. Toil and slavery, stern as they were in action, were forgotten awhile in relaxation; it gave man more of the simplicity and lustiness of nature; it sent his spirit abroad over the works of God, over the fields, the woods, and the mountains; it gave his mind more health and susceptibility of enjoyment; in short it made him anything but the meagre, calculating and repining creature of modern times. Had these harmless sports still flourished invulnerable to the tempest of revolution and the shock of years; society would have contracted little of the dissipation, which is its shameful characteristic in our days. What scenes of almost Arcadian spirit and beauty were presented in the

welcoming of the infant smiles and flowers of summer, beneath the wreathy may-pole ; and how did pleasure reach its climax in the rough hilarity, which distinguished the festival of Christmas, when pomp divested itself of its gaudy apparel, when the castle and the cottage were equal, and every venerable hall threw its doors open to enjoyment. As the yule clog brightened into a vigorous flame on the hearth, as the wassail bowl went round, and the fearful traditionary legend drew a feeling of intense interest over the mind, man became the vigorous and substantial creature that heaven intended him to be. The aspect of the country, too, accorded with these rude and hospitable scenes ;—vast forests giving a proud sternness to the landscape, the gloomy castle shedding a black shadow on the stream, the wild deer trooping through the rude woodlands, were indicative, and in some measure, creative of the golden-hearted spirit, which distinguished the feudal times of England.

From the notice in Domesday Book, which suggested these remarks, it will be seen that the manor, if not the town of Wisbech had its vassals ; as *villeins*, *bordars*, and *socmen* are each but a separate and gradationary description of serfs. Had fuller records of our history during these ages been preserved, we should probably have had to enter more at length upon this subject ; but from 1080 to 1190 we meet with scarcely anything of the slightest importance relating to Wisbech.

Richard 1st, one of the most able monarchs that ever sat on the throne of this kingdom, has connected his name in a very gratifying manner with the History of Wisbech at this period. We are not informed of the

circumstances that drew his attention and his bounty to the town; but it must have been called forth by some exhibition of loyalty on the part of the inhabitants, as man, it must be reluctantly confessed, is not charitable by nature; but requires some spring however secret, in the way of gratitude or the anticipation of reward, to call forth his benevolence. The act of Richard to which we refer was the remission of tolls to the tenants of Wisbech Barton in all fairs and markets throughout England, a grant which his brother John afterwards confirmed. From the insecurity of the times it was again lost and afterwards renewed by Henry 4th. Henry 6th. again confirmed it; but even these repeated royal sanctions could not preserve its benefit to the inhabitants. The right was, at some unknown period, lost; but the philanthropy of Nicholas Sanford who died A. D. 1638, again bought his townsmen the privilege.*

The contentious times which followed the death of Richard and the elevation of John to the throne, were particularly experienced on these eastern shores of the kingdom. John had taken up his abode at Lynn, which, when every part of his dominions was arming against him, still continued faithful to his interest and his cause. On his last departure from that place, and after his final misfortune in the Wash, the King came to Wisbech; but his visit could only be temporary, as this was the 12th of October, 1216, and he died at Newark

* A slab, in the church, over the grave of this exemplary character, bears this inscription :

‘ He was
A patterne for townsmen, whom we enrolle
For at his own charge this towne hee freed of tole.’

on the 18th. It has been remarked that 'there is no solid mark of this monarch's residence at Wisbech, except that he might furnish the means of erecting certain almshouses, there being buildings of that denomination, called by many 'King John's Almshouses' situated on the north side of the Churchyard; but this is very doubtful matter, and even if they were erected from his donation when at Wisbech, they certainly have been rebuilt, not bearing the least mark of antiquity about them.'* Were this circumstance correct, and we have nothing to confute its truth, it would seem, that Wisbech, like Lynn, was attached to the party of this monarch, and his beneficence to the latter town for its adherence to his cause, shows that he was not divested of gratitude to his partizans, although so negligent of the affections of the great mass of his subjects. But Wisbech was probably at that time only a place of insignificance, and therefore scarcely able or bold enough, to assert any decided principles, or take an active part in political contentions, especially when the enemy was mustering his forces almost within a bowshot of the Town; while Lynn it must be remembered was a place of considerable trade and commerce, being even at this early period, able at once to recruit the armies of the King and provide him ships for his operations by sea; but he was shortly to require its assistance no longer. The disaster of losing his wealth in the wash, and his death at Newark a few days after, have been noticed in the History of the Fens.

The peacefulness of the kingdom was not entirely restored by the accession of a young monarch, who possessed much of the weakness with little of the low

* Watson.

cunning of his father. A band of discontented nobles, imitating the example of the followers of Hereward, again assembled in the Isle of Ely, trusting to the security of its morasses, rather than to their own arms. We know not the length of time this force was able to sustain its rebellion, or even its numeral strength; but we are told that the inhabitants of Lynn purchased their lost liberties of Henry by engaging these outlaws near Littleport, by whom they were completely defeated, and many of them slain. Wisbech may have had its share in the conflict; but if so, the historian has passed it over in silence, as we only find that the rebels afterwards continued long in possession of the country, and, by interrupting the intercourse of Lynn with the interior of the country, greatly injured its trade.

A more awful calamity however than the loss of a battle was preparing to come over this town and the country around it. Art is in every respect subservient to nature; and the latter in her ferocious moods will often darken, desolate, and destroy the proudest triumphs of the ingenuity and perseverance of man. The calamities of human existence come over us with a lamentable variety and strength; but perhaps Wisbech never experienced one more awful and general than the inundation which occurred in 1236. Holinshed and Matthew of Westminster have both noticed it, and agree in describing its effects upon the town as most fearful. Nature has almost invariably provided us a refuge from misfortune, and in her destroying hours she often lifts the shield while she points the arrow; but, on this occasion from the peculiarity of the country, sunken as it were beneath the level of the sea, from the

violence of the tempest, its suddenness, and duration, the flood seems to have come over the inhabitants without the least warning, and to have worked its errand of death with the most horrid sacrifice. This tempest, for by such was the inundation caused, happened the day after the feast of St. Martin, and was preceded by many of less destructive importance. The supersition of the times pretended that they were preceded by strange meteors and wonderful appearances in the heavens. The storm continued for several days with unabated fury, washing up the ocean in such tremendous waves that the banks gave way, and the whole country lay completely exposed to its awful fury. 'The marsh countries,' says Holinshed, 'near to the sea were drowned and overflown, beside great herds and flocks of cattle that perished. The sea rose continually, flowing the space of two days and one night without ebbing, by reason of the mighty violence of contrary winds. At Wisbech and in the villages thereabouts, the people were drowned in great numbers, so that in one village there were buried one hundred corpses in one day.' This plain narrative contains a vast mass of human woe. Had all the united particulars of the flood been handed down, we should probably have been presented with a most frightful picture of calamity. A deluge in every country is attended with great destruction of property and life; but in a marsh like this, where there is not the least elevation for retreat or shelter; its effects must have been most distressing; in fact, it appears, that the whole town was destroyed, and that even the castle was not able to withstand the shock of waters.

The injury which such a deluge must have done to the embankments could not be slight, and, though a period of thirty years would appear to be a great length of time for them to remain unrepaired; yet, such would seem to be the case, as in 1266 we are informed by documents in the Muniment Office of the Bishop of Ely, that the town and castle were again utterly destroyed by a second inundation of the sea.

These repeated floods, so fatal in their effects and so near each other, must have greatly intimidated those inhabitants of the town who had survived their ravages, and have excited a perpetual alarm throughout the Fens. To these disasters was to be added another, which, though less immediately felt, was much more fatal to the interests of Wisbech, and has been to the present time an irreparable loss to its trade. We allude to the diverting of the Nene waters into those of the Ouse. This has been partly related in a former portion of our History, but its effects upon Wisbech have been only casually remarked on. It seems very possible that the ravaging floods which we have related, were the first to act detrimental to the outfall of the Nene; for before this reprehensible measure of forcing the Wisbech waters into the Ouse by Lynn, Wisbech, according to Badesdale, was a place of commercial importance, 'of old time' says he 'ships of great burden resorted to Wisbech.' If then it enjoyed trading advantages through its river, a gradual and effectual decay would have been prevented by the enterprise of its inhabitants. Atkins, who wrote in 1608, describes Wisbech river as anciently an arm of the sea, and says that all the waters of the Ouse, had their passage by Welney and

Well to Wisbech and the Washes. From Thorney Red Book he also shews that Well stream was an ancient appellation of the Wisbech river. He adds, that this outfall, or arm of the sea, had Holland and a part of the isle on one side, and Marshland on the other; these were defended from it by great sea banks, which in the time of Henry 6th, were ordained to be made and maintained fifty feet high. The sea however forsaking the isle in progress of time made the passage between Wisbech and the Washes, high marshes, and sands; and, by the decay of the river, the channel, or outfall, became so shallow as to admit of people going over on foot. He also imputes much blame to the people of Wisbech for not scouring and dyking the river, and attributes the drowning of the Fens to this neglect.*

Whatever might be the inducement to change the course of this important river, and all that we can gather through the long period of five hundred years is very unsatisfactory, we may be assured that it was ruinous to the town, and at once destroyed its importance.

The reign of Henry 3rd, it will be seen, was as fatal to the interests of Wisbech as it was unsatisfactory to his kingdom; but the prospects of the town, after a time, began to brighten. The silence which is preserved during the dynasty of Edward the 1st, and 2nd, leads us to suppose it gradually retrieving the losses it had sustained, during those diversified and calamitous reigns, and in the first year of Edward 3rd, we find the Bishop of Ely, John Hotham, obtaining a charter for a fair here, which was to continue twenty days, a length of time which would seem to give it importance.

* Hist: of Lynn, Vol. 1. p. 16, 17.

Notwithstanding therefore the chain of disastrous calamities, which almost swept the town from the face of the country in the reign of Henry 3rd, it must at this time have regained much of its original consequence.

Ancient records of this, the twelfth century, mention Todenham Hall in Wisbech, the seat of the family of Todenham; but nothing is left but the record to indicate such a mansion ever having been in this part. A bridge had also before this period been erected over the river, as in 1326, the Bishop of Ely obtained a grant of a tax on all saleable goods going into the town for the purpose of repairing the bridge, but the most considerable local event was the foundation of the Guild of the Holy Trinity, whose subsequent importance to the town calls for some slight investigation, we shall therefore preface its foundation in 1379, with a few remarks on the nature and origin of these precursors of the Corporations of England.

CHAPTER IV.

The Guild of the Holy Trinity.

THE first introduction of Guilds into this country seems to have been owing to that secret pride, which leads man to associate only with those of his own rank and consequence in life, the clubs and benefit associations of the present day being only an amplification of these ancient institutions. They were of various kinds, in most trading towns descending from the highest to the lowest grade of society. Lynn it is said had no less than thirty-one Guilds, Wisbech does not appear to have ever possessed more than eight besides the Holy Trinity, to which they were all subordinate. Some of them were large trading companies, holding considerable possessions in houses, land, and mercantile property, they were formed for the mutual benefit of their respective members, and were calculated to advance the interests of the individuals who composed them.*

* Richards.

Of their origin little is known, and much surmised. Many think them to be derived from the Anglo Saxons, and others suppose that Monks were the earliest Guild brethren. Camden informs us that the origin of Guilds and fraternities is said to be from the Saxon law, by which neighbours entered into an association, and became bound for each other, to bring forth him who had committed any crime, or make satisfaction to the injured party; for which purpose they raised a sum of money among themselves, and put it into a common stock. They flourished, says the same author, long before any formal licenses were granted them. Turner, in his History of the Anglo Saxons, attributes their origin to that people, and thinks the object of their union to be that every family should pay a penny annually at Easter and on the death of a member one additional penny for the welfare of the soul of the dead, which was to be expended in purposes of religion, burial, &c. Priests were to sing masses, for their living friends and for the dead. The same author also remarks that there were also Guilds or fraternities for carrying on commerce, even thus early; and that they seem on the whole to be friendly associations, made for mutual aid and contribution, to meet the pecuniary exigences which were perpetually arising, from burials, legal exactions, penal mulcts, or other payments or compensations. That much good fellowship was connected with them, cannot be doubted. The fines of their own imposition imply that the materials of conviviality were not forgotten. He thinks that on the whole they might very justly be termed Anglo-Saxon clubs.

The Wisbech Guild, to which of course our chief

attention is directed, was apparently of a religious description, and named; *The Guild or Fraternity of the Holy Trinity in Wysbech*. Its affairs were regulated by a certain number of officers, varying from six to eighteen, of whom the head was named Alderman. They assembled yearly, at the time of the feast of the Holy Trinity, to elect their officers and were then called an Inquisition. The register of their proceedings, which has been preserved, names their first officers six in number, viz. An Alderman, two Scabini, a Clerk, a Dean, and an Hostiliarius. The Scabini were stewards to the Guild, and had the charge of its property, the Dean appears to have been a kind of auditor of the accounts, and a part of his office was to warn the Alderman and brethren to have their accounts ready at the election: the last named, Hostiliarius, was a steward of a lower grade than the Scabini, whose office it was to assist in the entertainment of strangers.

The register of this ancient fraternity is in the possession of the Corporation of Wisbech. It is written in Latin, the prevalent and familiar language with the learned of those days, which confirms the respectability as well as the antiquity of the association. We have availed ourselves of a translation by Col: Watson, of some portion of this document as it affords many quaint traces of the Guild and is illustrative at the same time of its economy and expenditure.

Memorandum that here begins the Book of the Accountants of the Brotherhood of the Holy Trinity.

The account of Adam Reynald, the chaplain, Simon

Pokedych, Adam Mareys, Gilbert Grout, the skyvens* of the Guild of the Holy Trinity of Wysbech, from Sunday on the feast of the Holy Trinity, in the 2d year of king Richard II. after the conquest, to the same Sunday in the 3d year of king Richard II. for one whole year: Imprimis, in a tenth received for the chaplain. Also in the sum of £4. 5s. 8d. received of the brotherhood of the said fraternity, from the feast of Saint Michael, in the third year of the reign of Richard II. to the feast of Saint Michael next following except the pence which were received for ten novices, for the third time from the nativity of Saint John the Baptist next following:—Sum, £4. 9s. Also in the sum of 26s. 8d. received of sixty-four brethren of the said fraternity, for the purchase of an image of the Holy Trinity:—Sum, £1. 6s. 8d. Also in the sum of 46s. 8d. received of fourteen novices, viz. John Tyd, John Austin, senior, John Hillary, William Fyscher, John Austyn, junior, John Curteys, Martin Mylys, John Barbour, Richard Barbour, John Cuckope, Peter Hurry, Peter Veck, Henry Barker, and William Dunham, of each of them 3s. 4d.:—Sum, £2. 6s. 8d. Also in the sum of £5. 11s. 8d. received of sixty-seven brethren of the aforesaid fraternity, viz. of each of them 20d.:—Sum, £5. 11s. 8d. Total sum, £13. 14s.

Expended.—First, they account in a payment made

* Scabini, Scavini, or Skyvens, were the guardians, governors, or stewards, and had the charge of the goods and effects of the guild. They were two, and sometimes four in number; seniors going off yearly, when two others were chosen. They were sworn, when they received the chattels of the house, to employ the same faithfully to the good of the guild.

to Mr. Adam Reynald, the officiating chaplain of the said fraternity, for one whole year, viz. from the feast of Saint Michael last past, to the said feast next following, £4. 6s. 8d.:—Sum, £4. 6s. 8d. Also they reckon for the purchase of one image of the Holy Trinity, 25s. 3d. And they paid to the plaisterers 8s.; and for one man's assistance for the said plaisterers for one day, 4d.; and they paid to John Kyngsper for the removal of *Parclos*, with timber and boards and iron nails for the same, and for beer given to the workmen, 3s. 2½d.; and they gave to John Flaxman for his labour to Walpole for carriage of the tent, 6d.; for sand and whitening bought, 12d.:—Sum, £1. 18s. 3¼d. Also they reckon for two pieces of woollen cloth bought in London, for hoods for the brethren of the said fraternity, with the carriage from London to Wisbech, £5. 6s. 8d.:—Sum, £5. 6s. 8d. Also they reckon for bread bought 3s. 6d.; for beer bought 16s. 6d.; for wine 2s. 7¼d.; for beef bought 3s.; for saffron* 1d.; for eggs 4d.; for one quart of verjuice 2d.; for fish 3d.; cheese 13d.; for beer given at the fitting up of the hall 4d.; for the cook's wages 6d.; as a reward for the brethren at Lynn for their care and labour 6s. 8d.; for five minstrels 10s.; for the expence of Nicholas Tyneteshalle to Lynn, and for the purchase of apparel for ten dancers, 5s. 8d.; for iron nails bought for the fitting up of the hall 6d.; and they gave to Robert, son of Thomas, for the hall and ornamenting the same, 3s. 4d.; and they gave to John Symond, for one man to hang up the burial things, 8d.; and they paid for a tent in part of payment 10s.;

* Saffron was used in cakes.

for paper bought for the accountant one farthing :—
Sum, £3. 6s. 4d.

Sum of all the expenditure, £14. 17s. 10½d. and so the expenditure exceeds the receipts £1. 3s. 10½d. which ought to be paid by the sixty-seven brethren, viz. each of them 5d.; and thus there would remain 1s. 11½d. which the said brothers expended in wine before they departed; and so from the account nothing remains. Amen.

*Memorandum of all the Necessaries belonging to the
Guild of the Holy Trinity.*

Imprimis, one crown, silver gilt; also one pair of beads of coral; also nine pair of beads of amber; also three pair of beads of jet; two pair for three of the silver ones; also two pair of beads of coral, with twenty silver; also, hanging over the aforesaid beads of amber, three crucifixes and three silver rings; also one crucifix; also of single rings, ten rings; also of double brooches, nine brooches; also of brooches with stones, six brooches; also of single rings with stones, eight rings; also one silver clasp, with nine pair of silver stomachers; also one double crucifix; also one stag with a gilt head; also one *ryn* with a stone, and one golden Jesu; also one chain, with a crucifix; also two Lambs of God of silver; also one gilt brooch; also one brooch; also two small brooches; also one pair of beads of beryll, with a crucifix and an image of the Virgin Mary; also one *accer*, which is called Dowbell W, with a crown; also one silver-gilt ring; also four stones of chrystal and a beryll; one branch of coral.

The fraternity, as appears from their proceedings, had a public hall for their meetings and consultations; which is mentioned several times in the records. In 1477, Thomas Barker is summoned to appear before the vicar and other co-fraters, in the Guild Hall of the Holy Trinity, to grant certain alms in perpetuity; and, in 1524, every brother and sister was ordered to give their attention, and come to the Guild Hall every year, and to go with the alderman from the hall to the church.*

This might at first appear an edifice of some pretension, since the earlier records mention the grant of a sum of money for ornamenting it; but a subsequent grant completely sets aside our modern ideas of embellishment, where the Guild gives orders for purchasing "two hundred reed," for the repair of their hall; and, it seems not improbable, that the whole town at this time was only a cluster of mud or turf cottages, thatched with reed.

Even the site of this edifice is now unknown, indeed Wisbech seems to have no monument left of its ancient character; the floods that have so repeatedly despoiled it, by sweeping away its old foundations, have given it the character of a modern town. In Lynn we meet with repeated relics of its past magnificence and power, the dull and narrow streets, the monastic walls crumbling piecemeal to the ground, its gates of ponderous architecture, the sturdy ruin of battered fortifications, and the antiquated statues frowning from some of its public buildings; have impressed upon it the air of a

* Watson.

town risen from the sleep of a thousand years. The black hue of time gives its venerable touches to every important edifice; and continually leads the mind to those solemn contemplations which seem to invest, like an atmosphere, the presence of antiquity.

The Guild had been founded fourteen years before it received the royal sanction, which was bestowed on it in 1393, by Richard 2nd; but from the disconnected and irregular manner in which the first records are kept, we can only, from time to time, gain a knowledge of their proceedings by the aid of a few hints which often mislead more than the most perfect silence.

The brotherhood,—we gather our particulars from their entries and proceedings,—were obliged to wear a hood on the days of meeting, and probably on other public occasions, and one curious memorandum in the register orders that each brother shall have one, on pain of two pounds of wax: a singular, and to us, enigmatical fine. All the brethren dined together on what was termed the ‘Principal Day,’ which was probably the feast of the Holy Trinity, when, in addition to the luxuries of the table we notice with pleasure that a minstrel was usually provided. When a brother or sister died all the Guild were obliged to follow the deceased to the grave,—many modern clubs preserve the same custom—to pray and make offering for the soul of the departed on pain of a fine of one pound of wax. Another item, which we must not forget to name, states that certain repairs were to be done in the hall, and that the workmen were to be paid fourpence a day.

What a revolution has come over every part of society since this quaint association sate in their thatched hall,

listening to the minstrel's songs of battle and of love. The effeminacy of refinement has left their customs without a memorial in modern habits: a simple record is all that remains, to convey a faint picture of their past consequence to posterity. We may perhaps form opinions too elevated of the happiness of antiquity, or of what is usually denominated "the good old times," but it is certain that under its simple and natural forms of rule, the miseries of human life, were much alleviated by social intercourse and hospitality. It is impossible, except by conjecture, to form the slightest idea of the actual state of the society and appearance of the town at a period so remote as this is from our times; but if we conceive a personage with hat steeping high above the head, his cloak hanging loosely from his shoulders, the toes of his shoes turned up and brought to a point; and could we associate with him irregular streets of houses and hostels, built perhaps of mud, clay, or wood, and thatched with reed or straw, we should probably have a tolerable idea of the appearance of the inhabitants and town of Wisbech at this period, and yet, such is the divine dispensation,—in these homely sheds the pulse bounded as lightly, and the heart loved as fondly as amid all the superfluous luxuries that the refinement of five hundred years have added to the pride and pomp of man.

The minor Guilds of Wisbech were eight in number; but their importance, considered with that of the Holy Trinity, was very small. The hall of the latter was lent for their use, and its members seem to have looked down upon the others with that encouragement and patronage, which is one of the privileges of rank. They

were called the Guilds of St. George, Corpus Christi, The Cross, St. John the Baptist, St. Peter, St. Thomas, St. Laurence, and of the Holy Virgin Mary.

From the records, the Guild seems to have continued in a flourishing condition throughout these contentious times. The wars of York and Lancaster were desolating the interior of the kingdom and destroying the power of its people; but the din of battle, compared with its clangour in other parts, could only have been faintly heard in this remote province; we therefore find the members of the Guild indulging in their feasts and revels with all the pride and satisfaction of peace-loving citizens. One of these banquettings at this period [1460] appears to have been on an extraordinary occasion and the list of provision, betrays the hearty and overflowing spirit with which our ancestors were wont to indulge in their rude festivities. In the enumeration of the articles directed to be provided for this banquet, we find seven bushels of frumenty, six dozen of beer, twenty-four custards, bokenard for pottage, one strike of veal, lamb or mutton, chickens or pigeons, and two shillings' worth of spices named, and finally it provides that if more is ordered they [the banquetters we suppose] are to pay for it out of their own purse; which was perhaps by no means an unnecessary caution.

Beside the officers we have enumerated, the accumulating power of the Guild had, previous to this time, [1475] added several others. We find a Scribe, two Storekeepers, Keeper of the Jewels, a Bailiff, and a Chaplain mentioned, and afterwards two Chamberlains, two Cupbearers, and a Porter. They had also an altar in the church, which shows how much religion was

mingled with the institution: it was however no uncommon possession of these fraternities, as all the Guilds that were able to support it, had, it appears, this appendage to their dignity, which was sometimes richly decorated. In one part of this interesting register we meet with an order for the altar of the Holy Trinity to be prepared for the 'Principal Feast' "with nine crowns, and pannel with the jewels," and previously with several memorials relating to the care of the jewels. From this it seems the fraternity kept increasing in this species of wealth. The employment of Keeper of the Jewels, would indicate them to be valuable.

It is rather surprising that no mention should be made in the register of the Guild of the visit which Edward 4th paid the town in 1469. This monarch after a pilgrimage to St. Edmundsbury came by Wisbech to Crowland with a suite of 200 horse; but the bare recital of his visit is its only memorial.

As the fraternity advanced in years, its observance of the rites of religion and charity seem to have progressively increased. Mention is more frequently and solemnly made of the duties to be observed. One order inculcates the presbyters of the Guild to celebrate three masses in the Chapel of the Holy Trinity [daily], the first at the sixth hour, the second at the eighth, and the third at pleasure; and commands that they appear in their surplices at all hours, to sing in the Chapel of the blessed Apostles Peter and Paul at Wysbech. At two obits, commanded to be kept in the Chapel in 1514, four torches of wax were ordered to be borne before the Alderman to and from Church, and to burn in the

Hall at the time of grace and prayers. The same were ordered to be borne before every brother and sister of the Guild at their death, and to burn all the time of the dirge and mass: these august regulations were, however, but the prelude of its dissolution.

The imposing ceremonies of the Catholic Church were fitted for the age in which they flourished; men the less cultivated they are, are found to be the fonder of parade and ornament, and nothing could be more satisfying to such desires than the gaudy pomp of Catholicism in the age at which we have arrived. There was a glitter and richness about every religious ceremony, extravagant as it was universal. The vast churches pierced with windows, whose pictured panes tessellated the floor with color, the glare of solemn tapers, the intoxicating clouds of delicious incense which filled the spacious building, the sweeping robes of stoled priests, the music of the deep-toned organ bursting forth and dying away and warbling 'along the roofs, like the pure airs of heaven,' the harmonies of their choirs, and the splendor of their altar decorations; all united in commanding the awe of an unlettered multitude, whose minds had never been cultivated by education, or regulated by experience.

But this tinsel-work of religion was hastening to its close, and was bearing down with it, not only the Guilds of Wisbech, but those of every town in the kingdom. Henry the 8th, having once been disgusted with the Roman supremacy, resolved, with the vindictiveness of an arrogant and cowardly tyrant, to subvert even the most trivial monument of its sway. The Guilds were, as has been noticed, strongly imbued with

the superstition of the Church, and were much under its dominion. These institutions, then, could not hope long to survive the decay of the religion, by which they were in a manner upheld, and they therefore gradually died away amid the disorder and commotion which filled the kingdom on the subversion of the monasteries; that period of heartless crime and desolate distress

When every form of death and every wo
Shot from malignant stars to earth below;
When murder bared her arm, and rampant war
Yok'd the red dragons of her iron car;
When peace and mercy, banish'd from the plain,
Sprung on the viewless winds to heaven again.*

The last meeting of the Holy Trinity was in 1557, the first year of the reign of Edward the 6th; but no entry of the proceedings of the body was made after 1540, the year of the dissolution of the monasteries. All the property of the Guilds on their final dissolution, fell into the Kings' possession, whose generous and gentle nature, widely at variance with the avarice of his grandfather, or the headstrong impiety of his father, converted this property into a means of founding many of the Corporations of this kingdom, and among others, that of Wisbech. We reserve this subject for our sixth Chapter; taking a previous glance at the History of the Castle.

* Pleasures of Hope. (Campbell's Collected Poems, Vol. 1. p. 7.)

CHAPTER V.

Early History of the Castle.

THE circumstances which led to the foundation of Wisbech Castle have been related in a former Chapter of this work; the few incidents of its history to the present period [1546] which have reached us, have now to be traced.

Most of the English Castles are of no higher antiquity than the Conquest. The accession of William introduced such arbitrary principles into government; and he was so profuse in his rewards of the lands of the English to his followers; that Castles became necessary to the protection of his Norman followers and their ill-gotten wealth, from the fury and resentment of the despoiled natives. From this purpose the Castle at Wisbech was erected, and, in the reign of Henry the 2nd, upwards of eleven hundred Castles had thus been built, which, on the further dissemination of the feudal system, became heads of baronies. Each

Castle was a manor: and its owner was called the lord of the manor; markets and fairs were held in its vicinity, houses multiplied around it, and many of our towns have originated in the protection that the Castle has afforded to a few dependent habitations. The Anglo-Norman Kings generally chose an eminence or the neighbourhood of a river for the site of their Castles, which they surrounded by a deep broad ditch or fosse, the latter name being applied to the ditch when dry. They often presented to the eye incongruous masses of building, and were always built in the heaviest and most durable style of architecture. Capt. Grose, in his *Antiquities*, has bestowed much research upon the various styles of Castellated Building, and describes the most perfect and magnificent to be built after the manner of the following description. On the inside of the ditch stood the wall, of about eight or ten feet thick, and between twenty and thirty feet in height, with a parapet and a kind of embrasure called crennels on the top. On this wall square towers of two or three stories were built, which served for lodging some of the principal officers of the proprietor of the Castle, while the inside served for storehouses, granaries, and other necessary offices. The top of this wall and the flat roofs of these buildings, were the important position of the defenders of the Castle when besieged, who, from thence discharged their missiles on the enemy below. The great gate stood also in this wall. It was strongly fortified with a tower on each side, and rooms over the passage, which was closed with thick folding doors of oak and often plated with iron; the portcullis was here too, an immense grate suspended above to let

down suddenly when the press of the enemy had forced the gates. These remarks relate wholly to the outer wall; a large open space or court, called the outer bayle, was within, in which commonly stood the Chapel. In the inside of the outer bayle was another ditch, wall, gate, and towers, enclosing an inner bayle or court, within which the chief tower or keep was built. This building, called also the donjon, or more properly the dungeon, was a large square fabric, four or five stories high, having small windows in prodigious thick walls which imbibed only a dull light. The baron here principally resided, and in the great hall that it included, usually entertained his friends and followers. The black vaults, which the day was never permitted to enter, were beneath this portion of the Castle, and here the wretched prisoners of these barbarous princes often languished years away in sickness and despair.*

* The following lines by Sir Walter Scott, are happy in their description of such a fortress.

‘The battled towers, the donjon keep,
The loop-hole grates where captives weep,
The flanking walls that round it sweep,
In yellow lustre shone.’

* * *

‘The Castle gates were barr’d;
Above the gloomy portal arch,
Timing his footsteps to a march,
The warder kept his guard.’

* * *

The Castle of Wisbech, was, we may suppose, built after the manner of that described by Gross; but every thing regarding its intimate structure is only imaginary. The seal of the governor has been preserved, and as it exhibits a Castle similar to the one on the seal of the Guild of the Holy Trinity, it is very likely to be a faithful delineation of the Conqueror's building, as it represents a heavy edifice of the rude cumbrous construction of that age. In the middle is an open space, with a formidable portcullis in front, towers flank either side, and three other united and embattled towers spring from the middle, immediately over the gate-way. The seal of the Guild represents a similar edifice, with three figures of human form, whose heads are surrounded with glories, and occupy the place of the three towers on the governor's seal. These figures are probably meant for representatives of the Trinity.*

However fruitless may be our search for the exact formation of this Castle, we are assured of its extent and strength from the authenticated circumstance of its walls having enclosed a space of four acres; two of which were occupied by the building. A moat, forty feet wide, presented an insuperable barrier towards the town, over

'The iron-studded gates unbarr'd,
 Raised the portcullis' ponderous guard,
 The lofty palisade unsparred,
 And let the draw-bridge fall.'

Marmion.

* The seal of the Governor of the Castle is made of copper, and is in the possession of Sir H. Colvill, of Duffield Hall, Derbyshire; that of the Guild is only an impression, in the possession of John Bellamy, Esq. Both have been accurately engraved in Col. Watson's History.

which was a draw-bridge facing the west front. This wall and moat were kept in repair by the proprietors of certain lands in West Walton, held by them upon that tenure. The governor was called Constable, and had a guard of soldiers to protect his person. A curious method of communication was resorted to, it appears, between the garrison and their friends during a siege. Leaden pipes were laid from the basement story of the Castle to the outside of the moat, by which the blockaded garrison could secretly and securely receive every information from their partizans without.

It is impossible to tell what scenes of guilt and misery have been presented within the confines of this citadel. The hands that perpetrated and the hearts that dictated them are now mingled with the dust of their victims; and the obliteration of eight hundred years has left but little to excite our pity or disgust. That it was used as a prison, and contained weapons of torture, is enough to satisfy us that many actions revolting to humanity have sprinkled its walls with blood and filled it with lamentations. The suspicious nature of man commonly gives him cunning enough to conceal from others any traces of his guilt, but the conscience with which Heaven has endowed him, though frequently unequal to the repression of crime, always triumphs and tortures when the deed is past and the victim is silent.

Castles may in some measure be deemed an indication of the spirit of the age in which they most generally prevailed;—an age in the infancy of art and improvement, arbitrary, warlike, and distrustful;—when the passions of man were bound by few of the restraints of justice, or the milder duties of humanity.

The Castle of Wisbech does not appear to have been the residence of any dignified personage; but was used only as an intimidation to the district in which it was situated. It seems to have been sedulously kept in repair and doubtless contained every requisite for a long and vigorous siege. The Constable, who constantly resided in it, had sovereign power over the establishment, and was probably paid by government.* Our materials will not allow us to enter into the minutiae of the regulations and proceedings of this place during these its earliest years, but we shall proceed to record, in a chronological order, the separated events that have reached us.

In the reign of Henry II. the Castle is said to have been dismantled. The inundations of 1236, which we have related,† swept the Castle away, or at least so much injured it as to make it uninhabitable; it must, however,

* The office of Constable or Keeper of the Castle appears to have been always conferred upon a person of distinction, who had his deputy, and held Courts Leet, Baron, and Hundred Courts. The Courts of Oyer and Terminer for the Isle were held in the moat-hall, these and public meetings of importance were at times held there, such as Commissions of Sewers. In 1414 the Constable's fee was £26. 7s. 8d.; his dwelling was a hall of freestone, near the gate of the Castle. In one patent, (1443) the house and chambers called 'Le Dungeon' are allotted to the Constable; and the same Author adds in a note that 'The great tower was the residence of the Constable or Governor; under ground were dismal dark vaults for the confinement of prisoners, which made this tower sometimes be called the Keep or Dungeon. In this building was the great hall, in which the owner displayed his hospitality by entertaining his numerous friends and followers.'—*Watson*.

† See p. 98.

have been repaired or re-built soon afterwards, as, in 1246, the Constable is not only named, but state prisoners appear to have been then confined in it. In 1260 it was again destroyed by inundation; but thirty years subsequent to this time we have confirmed information of its being used as a prison, for John de Dromore, of Scotland, is mentioned as having been confined here; it does not appear for what offence: but, as we know that Edward I. was at this time overrunning Scotland and slaughtering its inhabitants, it is therefore nearly certain that this prisoner was one of the leading men of that unhappy people. He was released on a promise to serve in the King's army against France.

In 1314 an important ecclesiastical person appears to have been confined here, Robert Wishart, bishop of Glasgow; together with the wife of Robert Brus;—they were afterwards removed to York. A century afterwards we find Dominus Steyle and several other prisoners taken by the Earl of Dorchester, mentioned as confined within its walls; but the offence of these, and many others which we shall have to name, is likewise unrecorded.

At this period the fortress had become so much out of repair by the effects of time and other causes, that bishop Morton resolved to re-build it. The office of Constable seems to have been suppressed before this time, and the Castle had become the property and—after the re-building—the palace of the bishop of Ely. From the frequent previous mention of repairs, it had, we may suppose, been long falling into decay. The bishop built it with brick; that of the Conqueror had been rudely constructed of turf and mud, and here during a part of the year the prelate usually resided. Bishop Alcock,

who preceded Morton, and was the founder of Jesus College, Cambridge, died here, in 1500. Willis, in his *History of Cathedrals*, states that Alcock re-built the Castle 'of brick' but this author seems evidently to have confounded the two prelates, as after being so recently erected, we cannot admit his solitary testimony of another re-building.

Even this remote corner of the kingdom was made to participate in the horrid and revolting scenes that were enacted in the reign of Mary;—that period, the most polluted, savage, and inhuman perhaps of the eight hundred years during which we are able authentically to trace the history of our country. Not content with the sacrifice of the good and great, the pernicious policy of Mary extended its poisonous effects over the humble and obscure. We are not told the exact date, but between 1554 and 1559, it appears that William Wolsey and Robert Piggott, inhabitants of Wisbech, were for their religious tenets, confined at Ely; that they were removed thence, and the brutal tragedy of burning them was performed at Wisbech.

Perhaps the two most notorious persons who were ever confined in this Castle, were Robert Catesby and Francis Tresham. Every reader of history must remember names which have been handed down to posterity in connection with the most cowardly and fiendish conspiracy, ever devised against the government of this country. Catesby, it seems, was confined here during the time of excitation, when England was threatened by the Spanish Armada, being, for reasons which have not reached us, an object of suspicion to the government of Elizabeth. We might indulge in various speculations

on two such nefarious characters, being confined in this Castle at the same time, perhaps under the same charge; and it seems not improbable that such a punishment might have inflamed the disgust they bore to government, and generated those hostile feelings against the country, which they afterwards showed in a most daring manner, and attempted so signally to avenge. During the same reign the important names of Thomas Whyte, bishop of Lincoln; John de Freckingham, the last abbot of Westminster; and Thomas Watson, bishop of Lincoln, occur in the list of state prisoners who were confined here. The two last-named individuals died during their imprisonment, and Watson was buried, according to Cole's M.S., in an obscure manner, which would seem to imply a suspicion as to the circumstances attending his death.

The bishops of Ely, after this Castle became their property and residence, appear to have, at various times, repaired and enriched it in a very munificent manner. Dr. Lancelot Andrews, one of the translators of the bible under James I., laid out a considerable sum in repairing it, and it was a custom of the Corporation to make a provision for the Bishop during his continuance. 'So late as the year 1668, the principal officer of the Corporation was ordered to buy an ox, one wether sheep, and one calf, to be brought into the Castle for provision for my lord at Ely; and subsequently a buck was ordered to be sent from Exton Park, to present one half to the Bishop of Ely.' Even at the present day the Town Bailiff attends to do homage to the bishop on his first visit to Wisbech after his instalment, and presents him with a purse of gold, the amount of course being optional

and merely complimentary, and the purse is returned by the prelate with the most disinterested gracefulness.

After the extinction of Popery this Castle, being only considered as an episcopal residence, was sold with the possessions of the church. It was bought by John Thurloe, Esq., who afterwards became secretary to Oliver Cromwell. Thurloe had the old edifice taken down and an entire new one erected in 1660, from a design by Inigo Jones. This edifice was merely a mansion, bearing not the least resemblance to the formidable buildings which we connect with the name of a Castle; it however still continued to be distinguished by its old appellation.

It was in taking down the old fortress at this time that several Roman bricks were found. They have been engraved in the Antiquarian Itinerary, where a full notice of these relics is given, part of which we extract.

‘ Among the ruins of the ancient building, the Roman bricks are understood to have been found. However, several of these Roman bricks have actually been discovered at Bath, and have been preserved at Dover, at Leicester, in the walls of the castra at Richborough, Porchester, and Pavensey, or near the great wall of Severus. The Roman bricks were considerably broader and thinner than those of more modern date, not generally less than eight or nine inches square. When pillars were made of brick, those that were square were composed of flat ones laid one upon another, with cement or mortar between, and those pillars that were round, were sometimes composed of flat round tiles, laid just in the same manner, and sometimes of semi-circular tiles, placed two in each row with the flat edges just together.

And as the Romans were passionately fond of inscribing and painting figures upon many parts of their dwellings, not excepting pavements, it is not surprising that they should sometimes put the flat surface of the bricks to the same uses. The figures on the bricks found at Wisbech resemble Roman soldiers in the act of beheading prisoners, &c. During the efforts of the Romans to eradicate the religion of the Druids, it may readily be imagined that the ornamental statues of their fanciful Deities, and other representations, were frequently placed in and about their public and private buildings.

Altars are generally dedicated to gods and goddesses, and sometimes to emperors. Many of these found in Britain are inscribed to local deities, or such as were supposed to preside over particular places. Some inscriptions, indeed, are only set up as memorials of finishing a considerable work, or public structure, and dedicated to no person: but whenever these appear, whether no letters or figures, they may have been equally intended to perpetuate the remembrance of some public or private event.*

These bricks have been preserved. One of them is enclosed in the wall of a modern tenement, in Timber Market, and others are in the possession of Wm. Peckover, Esq. and Wm. Watson, Esq., who are both fellows of the Antiquarian Society.

At the restoration the Castle again fell to the share of the Bishops of Ely, who, not occupying it themselves, let it on lease to the inhabitants. The Southwell family occupied it for more than a century; it was

* See Antiquarian Itinerary, Vol. 7.

also occupied by the Trafford family, who were possessed of very considerable estates in the neighbourhood.

At the latter part of the last century, the Bishop of Ely procured an act of parliament for enabling him to sell the castle estate, and Mr. Joseph Medworth purchased it for £2,245.

Immediately after becoming the purchaser, Mr. Medworth proceeded to carry into effect his plans for the improvement of the town. The crescent was, without delay, erected, and an estate was purchased for the purpose of connecting this most ornamental portion of the town with the market place. Since this period the continual addition of uniform buildings has enlarged this crescent to a circus. In 1816, whilst the old mansion or castle of Secretary Thurloe was still standing, Mr. Medworth made a proposition to the Corporation, to sell the Castle with the vacant ground around it, now occupied as a garden, for the purpose of a grammar school, on the most advantageous terms to the Corporation. He also laid before the Capital Burgesses a plan for taking down the present school premises, by which the Corporation would have been most easily enabled to form a new and direct street from the market place to Lynn road, at a comparatively trifling expense.

It has long been a matter of public regret that this proposition was not adopted by the Corporation at that time, and the terms proposed by Mr Medworth acceded to. We have never yet heard any satisfactory reasons for the scheme being rejected; but, of this fact we are certain, that the highly talented individual who was then the master of the grammar school, was decidedly favourable to the measure. It would appear that this

public improvement was defeated by caprice. Mr. Medworth purchased the whole estate upon speculation, and as he came in some manner a stranger to the town, having previously resided at Bermondsey in Surrey, all his plans were looked upon as being wild and chimerical by the principal members of the Corporation, who were enjoying that 'otium cum dignitate' which their industry and good fortune had acquired for them, and which generally induces the mind to rest satisfied with things as they are, and renders parties unwilling 'to meddle with those that are given to change;' or they might possibly be actuated by the persuasion that there was something hallowed in the spot which had so long been considered as the Delphi of learning; and that the oracular goddess would no longer lend a favourable ear to the young tyros in classic literature, when her tripod of state was removed from its accustomed and antiquated position. Mr. Medworth had not the happy tact of reconciling the opposition of adverse parties, so characteristic of the manners of the present day; being defeated in his wishes, he proceeded to demolish the Castle, and with part of the materials erected a house, not far from the site, for his own private residence.

The subterranean passages of the old Castle are not yet filled up, and we are still enabled to discover traces of the moat and old boundary walls; but the only old relics of the ancient building which were found among the ruins after its demolition, were several Roman earthen pipes, of palish red earth, about twenty inches long; the bore being three $\frac{1}{4}$ inch in circumference. They appear to have been used in the conveyance of water, and similar pipes have also been found at Walpole, with other old Roman remains.

CHAPTER VI.

The Corporation.

ON the suppression of the Guilds all the property, as we have observed, fell into the hands of the king. The first act, therefore, after the final suspension of the functions of these bodies of men, was the taking of an inventory of all their possession. For this purpose Commissioners were appointed 'to survey all the lay Corporations, Guilds, Fraternities, and all the evidences, writings, &c.' and the same Commissioners had power to assign the property of the Guilds 'for such goodly intents and purposes as the said Commissioners or two of them should appoint;' the maintenance of a grammar school, or preaching is especially mentioned, where any Guild or Fraternity, or the Priest or incumbent of any Charity *in esse*, by the foundation or first institution thereof, should have kept a *grammar school*, or a preacher.*

* Act for Charities Collegiate.

Two of these Commissioners were appointed to the investigation into the affairs of the Wisbech Guild of the Holy Trinity. They met at Ely in 1548, and the following information was conveyed to them by the aldermen and churchwardens.

‘The Fraternity was founded by certain devout persons in the second year of King Richard II., and was confirmed by many of the king’s successors. It possessed [we take this to be the meaning, though the abstruse manner in which the original is brought out almost defies penetration] a free school to educate and bring up youth to preach the word of God in, to celebrate other divine service, to relieve certain poor people, &c.’

We find a singular and rather complex account of the institution of a Chapel, at Murrow, among these articles, which is worthy of our notice.

‘There is,’ says the item, ‘one Chapel at a place called Murrow, in the fen-end of the same town, under the high Fendyke, which is named the Chapel of Corpus Christi, having one stipendiary priest, whose name is Sir [or the Reverend] Robert Yorke,’ and the article goes on stating that the Chapel was founded for the convenience of the inhabitants of that part of Wisbech parish, it being more than four miles distant from the parish church, and was besides, as the quaint document expresses it, ‘a very payneful, noisome way, and commonly insound.’ It goes on to mention another reason for the foundation, which, though it may seem a strange plea to us, might, in those precarious days, have been a highly necessary one. The fearful height of the waters in the Fendyke, contiguous to which the Chapel

was situated, is recorded as an inducement for the foundation, for 'the bank is yearly in great danger and hazard of breach, unless as well the inhabitants now inhabiting under the high Fendyke, as all other inhabitants dwelling within any of the fourteen towns [or rather villages surrounding Wisbech] were not at all times ready at hand, as well by night as by day, at the rising of every flood and sudden storm, (it is yearly in experience) that if there were lacking but four men, all the rest shall not be able of their power to save and preserve the bank without breach, and if any breach should chance for lack of man's help, (as God defend it from) the whole inhabitants of the town of Wisbech, and also of the other fourteen towns adjoining, should be utterly and clearly undone and destroyed for ever.' It then proceeds to state that the Chapel had been from time to time licensed by the bishop of Ely, and that for the maintenance of a priest, 'certain of the inhabitants being deceased, had given to the said chapel certain lands, to remain from time to time in the hands of the chapelwardens, towards the finding of the said priest.'

We now come to the property of the Guild. The document of this curious investigation shows the several quantities of land and messuages in its possessions, and in whose tenure they were at the time of the dissolution; but the general facts and quantities will be sufficient for our purpose.

The Guild had 616½ acres of land, 6 messuages, and 4 gardens, in Wisbech, Leverington, Elm, Emneth, Newton, Walpole, and other adjoining parishes, whose annual rental amounted to £46. 16s. 9½d. The miscellaneous expenses on this property amounted annually

to upwards of £18., besides £3. 15s. which was distributed yearly in relief to the poor, and £10. 6s. 8d. the wages of the master of the school; the clear annual value was therefore not much more than £14. or as it has been minutely calculated, £14. 1s. 6½d., which, valued at the rate of purchase,* amounted to £260. 10s. 10d. —the sum paid for the obtaining of the charter; but which was re-granted to the inhabitants on the conditions annexed to the grant.

The investigation of the Commissioners having been satisfactory to the government, and confirmatory of a grammar school having been supported by the Guild prior to its dissolution, a charter of incorporation was, by the intercession of bishop Gooderick, without delay granted to the town.

One of the first acts of the Corporation was the selling of the plate of the old Guild, or a part of it, amounting to 194 ounces, which had been restored to the town. This realized the sum of £44. which went towards defraying various expenses incurred in sluicing the little Eau, paving the market place, and remunerating thirty-seven men who had been sent to Lynn to assist in suppressing the memorable Norfolk rebellion of 1549.

During fifteen years we meet with no account of the proceedings of the Corporation. The accounts of this time have probably been lost, as we may very plausibly suppose that some register of their proceedings had been kept. Among the earliest notices which we meet with, the salaries of their different officers are not the least

* The Messuages are valued at ten years purchase, and the Land at twenty years.

interesting. The allowance to the Town Bailiff [1564] was £1. 6s. 8d.—to the schoolmaster £13. 6s. 8d.—to an individual for singing and maintaining God's service in the church, £3. 6s. 8d.—to the wayt of the town, £1. 13s. 4d.—a scavenger, 10s.—and a clerk or register of the bailiff's accounts, 10s.

The following is a list of 'implements' belonging to the body, which are stated to be remaining in the town-hall chamber, and delivered to the bailiff for safe keeping:

Pewter dishes and platters, in all twenty-eight pieces.

Three long spyttys for the kitchen chimney.

A corslett, complete

One salmon ryoyt, viz., the breast and the backe.

One coat of playt and four jackets.

One bow and half a sheaf of arrows, with case for them.

Four bylls and an old kettle.

Eight sydes of windows, late standing in the hall windows.

The only valuable article now handed over from the Town Bailiff to his successor is a silver tankard, given to the Corporation by one Loakes, and it generally graces the table at the annual dinner.

The Burgesses met for the despatch of business on the first Tuesday in every month, to which they bound themselves by a contract. They also engaged by the same agreement, on that day 'to dyne together at such place as should be agreed upon by consent, and to pay for theire dinners four-pence, and no more, and that he yt. is absent to pay four-pence for his dinner, as yff

he were present;' a subsequent order institutes, 'that if any person who had agreed to assemble every month should be absent, and not pay four-pence for his dinner, the bailiff of the town lands should pay it, and the defaulter be never again admitted into the company.' This order, however, after a time began to be disregarded; and the attendance of the members was ultimately enforced by the imposition of a larger fine. This custom was continued nearly to the end of the last century, and the necessity for it was only superseded by the spirit-stirring energy of modern times.

Wisbech was again in the year 1571 to experience all the horrors and calamity of another flood. The sea banks had unwarrantably been suffered to decay, and, during the delay necessary for obtaining an order for their repair (a circumstance which occurred again only during the last year) from the court of sewers, a violent and unprecedented storm broke over the country, levelled the banks, and laid the land under water. Holinshed has again in strong terms represented its ravages, and states that the sea broke in between Wisbech and Walsoken, and at the Cross Keys, drowning Tilney, Old Lynn, Tid St. John, Walpole, Walton, and Emneth, and he says Wisbech, Guyhorn, Parson Drove, and Hobshouse were overflowed. The cattle destroyed was estimated at £20,000. in the villages around Wisbech, besides the quantity lost in the more remote places. Bourne, says the old authority we have mentioned, was flooded to the midway height of the church.

Sixteen years after this visitation another storm, horrible in its character, and more devastating in its effects visited Wisbech, and swept much of its population

away : we refer to the plague. The Corporation records lead us to form a very mournful picture of this great and distressing misfortune. It appears to have broken out at Guyhirn, and, though from the first appearance of the disease the greatest precautionary measures were adopted, it spread rapidly and malignantly. The draining of the streets and channels, the prevention of all persons and goods from entering the town without vigilant search, and the dividing it into ten wards, were among these laudable cautions. The sick were also all directed to be taken to one particular spot called Berton, (now Barton Lane,) and provisions were carried to them by a regularly appointed conveyance; none, excepting those appointed to their superintendence, being allowed to communicate with them.*

The disease, it appears, broke out in April, and during the whole summer months raged without intermission. In November, however, it began to abate, and those who were in a state of convalescence were allowed to go abroad, under strict regulations. The disorder appears to have raged most violently in September and October : an hundred and four persons having, according to the register, been buried during these two months ; which number, calculating the population at 1,500, (and it could not have been more,) very forcibly exemplifies the mortality of the disease.

In 1588 the butchers' shambles, which were removed

* This regulation was so strictly enforced that the records mention two persons who were sent to the House of Correction for entering a house in that part of the town which was infected.

in 1810, were erected by the ten, at the cost of £85. 19s. 4d., and in 1592 the portrait of Edward VI., which is still preserved in the town-hall, was bought; the following is the record of its purchase:—‘Memdum. I bought for the towne, in London, the picture of King Edward VI.—K. E.’ The patriotism of seven inhabitants of the town in contributing £175. towards assisting the expedition against the Spanish Armada should not be forgotten here.

Mention is frequently made in these old documents of the poor, and the relief they occasionally received from the Corporation, which may probably be accounted for from the circumstance of all the poor having been left destitute of any permanent support on the dissolution of the abbeys and convents. While monasteries were prevalent, the poor had always ready access to the monks for support; but such a mode of relief was liable to objections in consequence of the indiscriminate manner in which it was distributed. It tended much to allay those incentives to industry which most pre-eminently exalt man in society, give a loftiness to his character, and make him spurn dependance on another for his support. It was, however, the policy of the Romish Church, and under this seeming philanthropy it held much of the power and popularity which so long supported its profuse and extravagant follies. When, however, the convents which had been the store-houses of indigence were no longer acknowledged by the government, a troop of paupers and mendicants were turned upon the world for a support, which could only be casual and at the humanity and caprice of individuals. The various sums allotted to the poor which we meet

with in these proceedings, were, in all probability, originally the gifts of individuals, which were consigned to the 'ten more honest and discreet' to distribute.*

In 1613 and 1614 this town and the country around it again experienced the alarm and peril of two floods, which have been commemorated by an inscription in Walton Church. There was formerly an inscription recording them in Wisbech Church, but this was afterwards effaced to make room for a monument. As the description in both is very full and satisfactory, and as they are also interesting in themselves, we shall transcribe them.

That in Walton is as follows:—

Gen. 9. xiii.

'Heaven's face is cleared, though the bow appeared:
Reader, ne'er fear, there is no arrow neare.'

'To the immortal praise of God Almighty, that saveth his people in all adversities. Be it kept in perpetual memory that on ye first of November, 1613, the sea broke in and overflowed all Marshland, to the great danger of men's lives, and losse of goods; on the three-and-twentieth day of March, 1614, this country was

* The subject here briefly referred to—that of administering relief to the poor under the Monastic Institutions, the origin and progress of the Laws of Elizabeth, and their administration at the present day—is one of very considerable interest, and we regret that the limits of our work will not admit of further amplification.

A revision of the present objectionable system of administering Parochial Relief and the burthen of the Poor's rates are now under the consideration of Parliament.

overflowed with the fresh, and on the twelfth and thirteenth of September, 1671, all Marshland was again overflowed by the violence of the sea.'

Dated 1677.

The following is from Wisbech Church. It was scrolled on three compartments of the east window, which is walled up. The following was recorded on the first compartment.

'To the immortal praise of God Almighty, that saveth his people in all adversity. Be it kept in perpetual remembrance that on the feast of All Saints, being the first of November, in the year of our Lord 1613, late in the night the sea broke in, through the violence of a north-east wind meeting with the spring tide, and overflowed all Marshland, with this town of Wisbech, both on the north side and on the south, and almost the whole hundred round about, to the great danger of mens' lives, and the loss of some; besides the exceeding great loss which these countries sustained through the breach of banks, and spoil of corn, cattle, and housing, which could not be estimated.'

The second compartment contained some verses in Latin, which we shall give in the chapter on the Church, and the third was occupied by the following further account.

'In the next year following, that is to say on the year of our Lord 1614, on the three-and-twentieth day of March, this country was again overflowed with the fresh water, which came down in so great abundance through the extraordinary great snows which fell in that year, in January and February, that not only this

town, (whereof the south side only was lost,) but the greatest part of the grounds within the south-east bank in Holland, from Spalding to Tydd St. Giles was drowned and almost wholly lost for all that year. Moreover a great part of Marshland, from their bank called Edge, between their towns and the smeeth to their new podykes, was lost through diverse breaches between Salter's Lode and Downham Bridge. In conclusion, many towns in Norfolk, confining with Marshland, and most parts of this whole Isle of Ely.*

We are now approaching those times when tumult and contention again divided the kingdom, but ere the fatal scenes of the latter years of Charles I. were enacted, we stop to notice the renewal of the charter of the town. The incompleteness of that granted by Edward VI. had been greatly felt, and application was accordingly made in 1610 to James I. for its renewal, with further powers for purchasing lands, and also restricting the right of election to freeholders only of 40s. per annum and upwards.

The king was pleased in the ninth year of his reign, by his letters patent, to grant the petition, and to declare the inhabitants of the town to be a body corporate,

* This inscription is copied from Cole's M.S. in the British Museum. Mr. Cole was Vicar of Burnham, in Buckinghamshire, and died in 1782. He took great trouble in enquiring into the curiosities and antiquities of Cambridgeshire, and left his M.SS. and collections, in 100 folio volumes, to the British Museum, on condition of their not being opened until twenty years after his death, when the many personal anecdotes which he had interspersed through their pages would belong only to the unoffensive dead. The above was given to the learned gentleman by Mr. Greaves, of Fulborne.

by the name of 'The Burgesses of the Town of Wisbech, within the Isle of Ely, in the County of Cambridge,' and that they should have perpetual succession, and power to hold estates for terms of years or otherwise, as well as to grant, sell, or exchange, and adding a confirmation of the estates previously enjoyed by them. After this grant the ten burgesses, when elected, assumed the name of 'Capital,' which continues to be their honorary distinction. An attempt was subsequently made in 1688 to obtain a renewal of the charter, with a power of appointing the ten Capital Burgesses for life; but the Corporation were directed to oppose such proceedings and to obtain its renewal with the same privileges as the freeholders had before enjoyed. Accordingly a renewal was obtained, although a caveat was entered against it, and on the petition of the ten burgesses, his Majesty Charles II., in the twenty-first year of his reign, confirmed and enlarged the former privileges of the town by a new charter.

In 1636 the burgesses neglected to elect the ten Capital Burgesses for the year ensuing, and therefore according to the charter, the last Corporation met and re-elected themselves. This is the only instance on record where such a neglect occurs.

During the unhappy war between Charles I. and his parliament, which has been referred to, the Isle of Ely was secured to the parliamentary interest by Cromwell, who knew its importance, and therefore by the most vigilant movement gained the possession, and was appointed governor of it. The adjoining districts of Lincolnshire were in arms for the king, and Cromwell in consequence secured his possession by fortifications,

which he erected about a mile east of Wisbech, at the Horse Shoe,* keeping a garrison of soldiers stationed there. The Wisbech Corporation advanced £150. it appears, to the cause of the usurper, for although it is named in their proceedings as given to the *king and parliament*, it clearly indicates the latter. But Wisbech, it seems, was not resigned to the cause of the stubborn soldier, and a mutiny broke out in the town, probably of an alarming character, as eight hundred soldiers were sent down to quell it.

The large army which was on either side maintained, was necessarily a heavy tax upon the country; we find accordingly that Cambridgeshire and the Isle of Ely were by parliament ordered to provide a weekly sum of £783. 15s. as their share for the maintenance of the war. The part of this sum which fell to Wisbech was deeply felt by the inhabitants, who petitioned parliament on the plea that they paid more than their proportion according to the neighbouring counties, and that they had sent a troop of horse for the service of parliament. They also represented that they had with

* An anecdote of Cromwell is related in Watson's History. 'At Needham Hall, Elm, three miles distant from Wisbech, is preserved an ancient table of Oak, (entirely one solid piece) which is rendered remarkable by the circumstance of Oliver Cromwell having reposed on it one night; and there is now (1827) living in the parish of Elm a person far advanced in years, who well remembers his grandfather saying 'that when he was a boy he saw Oliver Cromwell and his troops pass by the avenue leading to this hall, and that the person then inhabiting the mansion offered Cromwell his best bed, which he declined, observing, that perhaps the next day he should have to sleep in the open field.'

others expended £2,000. in reducing Crowland, which they prayed might be reimbursed to them, and finally asked for an exemption from their arrear of taxes, on account of another flood which had drowned the country around, and destroyed their cattle, houses, and other property.

This national scene of strife was brought to a memorable termination by the battle of Naseby and the subsequent death of Charles. An usurper, conscious of the frailty of his power, always seizes on some latent point of human character that may be more easily subdued, and by working on this, he establishes his empire more on passion than on reason. Cromwell concealed his heartless designs beneath the cloak of religion, and a tribe of fanatics have peculiarly and not ingloriously marked the period of this protectorate. But with him expired the rigid severities to which the kingdom had rather submitted than heartily embraced, and therefore on the re-call of Charles II. to the empire of his fathers, the most extravagant demonstrations of joy filled the land, the people seemed to have suddenly burst into liberty, and a reckless and demoralized indulgence of the passions continued through the whole reign of this profligate monarch. Wisbech seems to have mingled in the festivities that accompanied the restoration, and the Capital Burgesses decreed a sum of money for the entertainment of the inhabitants.

An important but not altogether unaccountable event occurred during the short protectorate of Richard Cromwell. From the Corporation proceedings and from the journals of the House of Commons it is certain that Secretary Thurloe was elected by this town, in 1658, to

serve in parliament, but being elected also for Huntingdon and the University of Cambridge, he chose the University and waived his election for Wisbech and Huntingdon. Wisbech, it is said, was a parliamentary borough as early as the reign of Edward I., but it does not appear whether it ever sent any member, though at the same time it is very probable that it did, since the laws for election of members of parliament were neither strictly enforced nor the privilege of election envied by the people, who on the contrary rather considered it a burden, and we find many places that have on some occasion elected and sent their members to parliament, are now without such an honorable distinction.

On the disfranchisement of a great number of the boroughs by the Reform Act, their privilege of sending members to parliament was transferred to other large towns having a population of ten thousand inhabitants. The town of Wisbech did not at this time contain that number within its own precise boundaries, but as far as a correct calculation could be made, it did not fall far short of the required amount, and the population was so rapidly increasing that it is surprising that no efforts were made to obtain that privilege, particularly as the county of Cambridge possessed a less number of representatives in parliament than any county of the same extent in the kingdom. We are aware that it would necessarily have introduced political feuds into society, and in some measure interfered with domestic comforts, yet the general interests of the town most decidedly required the aid of a representative voice in the legislative assembly. If we look back to the many

local acts for the drainage and improvement of the country, all so intimately connected with the interests of the port and town, that have been passed even within the last twenty years, and if we reflect how invariably those interests have been sacrificed to the more powerful influence of the proprietors of adjoining estates, we shall be more than ever convinced of the advantage which this town would derive from having a member of its own to attend to its exclusive interests. Wisbech would then possess that proper weight in all public measures to which its increasing trade and importance clearly entitle it.

We will now revert to the present proceedings of the Capital Burgesses, their mode of election and revenues, which will close our tedious, and, we fear, rather uninteresting details connected with the Corporation.

By the charter of King Charles II., which will be transcribed in an appendix to this work, we find that ten of the burgesses were annually to be elected Capital Burgesses, as, in the words of the charter, it is directed that thenceforth for ever, there should be within the Town of Wisbech, Ten Men of the better more honest and discreet burgesses of the said town, maintaining households, ('familias foventibus') to be nominated and elected Capital Burgesses of the said town, who should have the management of the estates and affairs of the Corporation; and it is provided that the freeholders of the town seized of any lands, tenements, or hereditaments, of any estate of inheritance, or freehold within the said town of Wisbech, or within the circuit or precinct of the said town, of the clear annual value of forty shillings by the year, and maintaining house-

holds in the said town, should meet in the Town Hall every year, on the second day of November, and proceed to the election of the ten Capital Burgesses.

It was, of course, impossible that the powers of the charter should either ensure or convey to the Ten the advantages of discretion, but every precaution was taken to ensure their honesty, and it requires, unhappily, but little knowledge of human nature even in the better classes of society to discover to us the necessity of preventing individuals, as far as possible, from making public measures a matter only of private emolument. It was, therefore, wisely directed by the charter that the Capital Burgesses should render annually an account to the inhabitants of all their receipts, payments, contracts, acts, and expenses, and that their books of proceedings and accounts should be exhibited in the Town Hall for public inspection, on the Monday next before the second day of November, annually, for the space of three hours, namely, from one o'clock p.m. to four o'clock of the same day; and again on the said second day of November for the space of three hours. By these regulations every inhabitant is enabled to ascertain how the funds have been managed and disposed of.

On the second day of November in every year, a meeting of the inhabitants is held at the Town Hall, in conformity with the provisions of the charter, where the proceedings of the former year are publicly discussed, and the candidates for the office of Capital Burgesses are then successively put in nomination. The terms of the charter appear only to require, as a qualification for a Capital Burgess, that he should be a householder;

but every elector as we have seen must also be a freeholder.

Every freeholder present is at liberty to propose a candidate, and should more than ten be put in nomination, a poll is then regularly taken, on a plan something similar to that adopted on the election of members of parliament.

The Meeting select the returning officer, who acts entirely on his own responsibility, assisted by two check-clerks, and the freeholders place a mark against such of the candidates as in their opinion (we have no means of judging of their private motives) are 'the better more honest and discreet' of the candidates. As soon as the clock has struck the midnight hour of twelve the books are closed, the names are regularly called over with the number of votes attached to each, accompanied by the applause or disapprobation of the meeting; the ten who have obtained the greatest number of votes are declared to be elected Capital Burgesses. The younger members occasionally mount the rostrum to return thanks to the gentlemen present for the honour conferred upon them, whilst the more grave and potent seniors quietly repose on their pillows, and suffer not their slumbers to be disturbed by the inharmonious concert of popular applause.

The returning officer affixes his seal to the poll-book, and it has lately, in conformity with a specific resolution of the meeting to that effect, been deposited with the other records of the Corporation, and never opened, unless in any case of legal enquiry, until the Capital Burgesses of the succeeding year have been elected, when it is destroyed, and consequently the proceeding is in some measure assimilated to the vote by ballot.

On the day after the election the Town Clerk summons the parties who are chosen to the Town Hall, and they immediately proceed to take the necessary oaths to qualify them for their office. We have read with every school-boy of Hannibal swearing eternal enmity to the Romans, and the same benign spirit seems to attend us in the national aversion which we are so frequently called upon to express in rather grave terms against the descendants of the Pretender, who, in all probability, would long have forgotten their dormant claim, did we not so constantly recall them to their recollection. We have as little fear of these exiles being seated on the throne as we should of the descendants of King Harold so quietly set aside by William the Conqueror, or of Boadicea queen of the Icenæ. We shall ever be ready to pay our cheerful, unceasing, and devoted homage to the memory of the Princess Sophia of Gloucester, and her protestant descendants, 'and pay our glad allegiance there,' but we cannot discover any necessity in the present day of disclaiming the Pope of Rome or any other foreign prince or potentate, nor do we see the necessity of the protestant church calling in the aid of oaths for the protection of possessions when properly acquired and properly appropriated. In obedience to the act of parliament 'in such cases made and provided,' the oaths are taken, and the Capital Burgesses proceed at once to business, and their first duty is to elect a Town Bailiff. This officer is not named in the charter, and is legally recognized for the first time in the act of parliament, which is commonly called the town act. It appears, on reference to the corporation records, that it is not absolutely

necessary to elect one of the Capital Burgesses to the office, for the appointment is regulated entirely by prescription or usage, and it appears that in the year 1564 one of the burgesses was called upon to act in that character.

The duties now required of the Town Bailiff are to call the Capital Burgesses together as occasion may require, and preside at their meetings, having the privilege of the casting vote in the event of their being equally divided in opinion on any question that comes before them, to convene meetings of the inhabitants on any public occasion, either on his own responsibility or in compliance with a requisition presented to him for that purpose, to receive the rents and the revenues, and pay the interest on the debts, discharge the annuities as they become due, in short the whole amount of the income and expenditure passes through his hands; and from the great addition that has lately been made to his labours by the additional revenues, and other important matters daily arising out of the increasing prosperity of the town, there frequently occurs a great difficulty in prevailing on persons to accept the office. In the year 1829 a gentleman was elected Town Bailiff by the other Capital Burgesses, but he declined to take upon himself the office on the plea of ill health, but as the same objection would have equally applied to his having in the first instance consented to become a Capital Burgess, and as the precedent, if allowed, might be attended with some considerable inconvenience, the opinion of Counsel was obtained as to the power possessed by the Capital Burgesses to compel a person when chosen to act as Town Bailiff;

but as the opinion expressed considerable doubt as to the compulsory power, another gentleman was prevailed upon to officiate, and thus any further discussion of the subject was set at rest. We have always been surprised that the Capital Burgesses do not pass a bye-law, which they are clearly entitled to do, making it compulsory, and imposing a fine on any party declining to take upon himself the appointment when elected, and we entertain but little doubt that the Court of King's Bench would enforce the performance of such a law.

When the Town Bailiff has consented to occupy the Chair of State, the officers are appointed, and the members of the Corporation on the fifth of November proceed to exercise the only personal privilege and luxury attendant on the office, and that is, of dining together, but at their own expense, and the Town Bailiff has the distinguished honor of contributing twice the amount of any other of his colleagues towards providing the banquet for the day.

For several years in succession the same parties were re-elected Capital Burgesses without opposition, and but little interest was taken in their proceedings. The members had hitherto been composed exclusively of persons professing the tenets and doctrines of the Church of England; but those who dissented from the establishment were daily increasing in numbers and importance, and having by their mercantile enterprise and trading industry become materially interested in the prosperity of the town and port, they naturally sought to have a voice in the direction of public affairs. Being of opinion also that the transactions of some members of the Corporation were not of the most liberal

cast, they were put in nomination at the annual election ; they were, however, met by a most strenuous opposition ; questions were repeatedly put to the candidates whether they had received the sacrament and complied with the provisions required by the Test and Corporation Acts, and every exertion was made to exclude the dissenters from participating in the management of public business. This town, which had hitherto been proverbial for its peacefulness and freedom from all party contests, was at once made the scene of commotion, and angry feelings were excited which it is to be feared are not yet altogether allayed. It was soon discovered that some of the parties who were so rancorous in opposition to the claim of the dissenters, had not themselves complied with the very provisions which were deemed an indispensable qualification for becoming a member of the Town Council, and which they were ever so ready to enforce ; and we fear that the revolting scene was exhibited of persons frequenting the altar for the sole purpose of enabling them to act in the capacity of Capital Burgesses. Happily for the cause of true religion this qualification was soon relinquished, and the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, whatever may be the opinion of individuals as to the effects of that measure, at length prevented members of the established church from thus trifling with its most sacred ordinances, to entitle them to assume the civic robe of state.

It has been asserted that the electors are too numerous, and consist in a great measure of a class of persons incompetent to exercise the power of selecting proper parties to become Capital Burgesses, that persons are unwilling to allow their acts to be so scrutinized

and commented upon by such an extensive number of constituents, and that they are unwilling to go through the ordeal of a public election; but it may be observed that every good citizen is bound by the laws or contract on which society was originally established, to fulfil the duties of his station, and as far as possible to contribute to the advantage of that community from which he derives his own means of support. If respectable parties will but act conscientiously for the public good without being biased by sectarian or party feeling, and if they do not arrogate to themselves an infallibility of opinion on every public question, they will always find that the people will know how to value their services and tender them their support. We sincerely hope that the town is not altogether so void of the feelings of common patriotism as ever to suffer the extensive funds of the Corporation to be administered, and their important and increasing duties to be performed by persons who are not strictly possessed of the qualifications required by the charter.

In the early part of the year 1833, a committee was appointed by the House of Commons, to institute an enquiry into the municipal corporations of the kingdom, which committee proceeded to obtain information from the Mayors, Town Clerks, and other official functionaries of some of the principal towns. The Town Bailiff and Town Clerk of Wisbech were summoned to attend the committee; they produced the charter granted to the town, and recapitulated the various duties and operations of the Capital Burgesses, the mode of election, the publication of their accounts, with other important matters connected with the enquiry, and the

chairman of the committee expressed himself in terms of general approbation as to the manner in which the Corporation had been constituted, and their duties fulfilled.

The committee were, however, unable to report fully and decisively to the House on the general question referred to their consideration, and recommended that commissioners should be sent to all the corporate towns for the purpose of obtaining more extensive information.

The Corporation of Leicester and a few other towns made a strenuous opposition to this enquiry, and setting at defiance the authority of the commissioners, it being, in their opinion, of an inquisitorial and unconstitutional character, refused to answer the interrogatories delivered to them, or to allow their records and proceedings to go through the ordeal of an investigation. The Capital Burgesses of Wisbech, however, used every exertion to co-operate with the commissioners in their laborious task. The publication of their accounts, and the mode of annual election constituted by the charter, had effectually secured an honest administration of their funds; they therefore felt no fear of censure, but proceeded to lay before the commissioners the records of their transactions, without the least reservation, and the learned gentlemen who were deputed to institute the enquiry, stated, that on their whole circuit they had not met with another instance where the lighting and watching of the town were effected without the aid of a local rate upon the inhabitants for that specific purpose, or where the funds were so exclusively appropriated for the benefit of the public.

The commissioners proceeded to ascertain from some

of the parties present (public notice having been previously given soliciting the attendance of the burgesses, inhabitants, and other individuals interested in the question), their opinions as to the mode of the election, when some suggested the propriety of the Capital Burgesses being elected for three years, and others that a part only of the members should be subject by rotation to annual election, in conformity with the system pursued in Scotland, and it was also suggested that the franchise should be extended to the copyholders as well as freeholders, and also to persons renting a tenement of a certain amount, that the electors should be registered, a returning officer regularly appointed, the qualification of the Capital Burgesses more fully defined, either as to amount of property or otherwise, and that the election should close earlier than twelve o'clock at night to prevent the temptation to riot which occasionally occurs at a meeting under such popular excitement.

The commissioners have not yet made their report to the House of Commons, and consequently no measures have yet been adopted; but we trust that ere many months have passed away the Corporations of this kingdom will be placed upon a footing more in accordance with the spirit of the times, and the existing state of society, and that other public companies will be compelled to appropriate their funds exclusively to the public service, in accordance with the example long since held out to them by the Corporation of Wisbech.

We have seen that on the dissolution of the Guild, the Corporation were in possession of 616 acres of land and in the year 1595 they purchased about thirty acres in the parish of Walpole. Their estates, however, have

been considerably increased by the enclosure of the fens and commons of the several parishes in which they are situate, and the rent-roll now exhibits 695A. 3R. 5P. of land, the rent of which, in addition to the Crane Wharf and Cattle Market Estate, forms what is usually denominated the fund for general purposes. In addition to these they receive the produce of the market tolls, which are most liberally presented to them by the Bishop of the Diocese as lord of the manor, the tonnage duties charged on vessels frequenting the port; and lands, and funded property to a considerable amount are placed under their controul and superintendence, to be appropriated to specific purposes. We have collected a general statement of the present income and expenditure of the Corporation, which will be found in the appendix, and it will tend to show the extent and value of the revenues and the necessity of having proper persons to watch over and regulate the just and faithful appropriation of funds so important to the public.

CHAPTER VII.

The Church.

MAN, with a laudable piety and ambition, has commonly exerted his utmost skill in the erection of his temples for religious worship. The singular pagodas of the Chinese, the gorgeous remains of Indian architecture, the glittering mosques and mausoleums of Mahometanism, the solemn ruins of Egypt, and the stately cathedrals of France, Italy, and our own country, all bear indisputable evidence that the same feeling of devotion and ambition for majestic elegance, has alike influenced the pagan, the barbarian, and the christian.

The earliest erections for religious worship of which we have any record, were altars, and on these, while man inhabited the forests and caves, he offered up the fruits of the earth and of his flocks. But as time matured his rude conceptions and enlarged his observation, he learned to defend himself from the warfare of the

elements, and the construction of a habitation scarcely preceded the erection of a temple, in which to offer up his orisons to the beneficent author of his existence. It is unnecessary and indeed impossible perhaps with accuracy, to trace the gradual rise of architecture from the first conical hut to those gigantic piles of building which adorned the cities of Babylon, Persepolis, and Thebes. Of the two former capitals not a vestige is left to attest their original greatness; but Thebes still retains such sublime fragments of its massive edifices, that had they not remained to show the bewildering vastness of their dimensions, such mighty fabrics would have been classed with the improbabilities of fiction. But notwithstanding their incredible greatness, such edifices could never be mistaken for the work of civilization and refinement, since their cumbrous deformity bears evident marks of the infancy of architecture, which contented itself with magnitude where it could not obtain beauty. It would seem that in constructing their places of worship the architects in those days wished them in some manner to accord with their ideas of the magnificent Being to whom they were dedicated, by swelling their proportions into colossal greatness.

The splendid mythology of India was not less favorable to architecture. But here on the contrary the temples were gaudy rather than gigantic; of the strangest diversity of forms, of the most costly materials, and the most extravagant embellishment. Over the whole of that vast peninsula, but particularly at Benares, are to be seen the splendid and unrecorded remains of their early paganism, whose history and date of erection is involved in as many mysteries as the

fictions of Brama and Vishnu. The serenity of the climate, the superstitious reverence of the natives, and the peace and happiness of the country during three thousand years have, however, preserved to this distant age these illustrious memorials of its early history, which, in a country of more civilization and boasted knowledge, would probably have long been desolate or forgotten.

The refined spirit and proud genius of Greece and Rome perfected the immature efforts of other nations. The orders of architecture rose successively in Greece, and proportion, elegance, and convenience were concentrated in their beautiful structures; but the ecclesiastical architecture which afterwards flourished deviated widely from the style that had been practised by these two celebrated states, and though it has been contemptuously denominated Gothic, there is a solidity, a grandeur, a beauty, and a susceptibility for ornament about it, which no other description of building ever so eminently possessed.

Prior, however, to the introduction of Gothic architecture for religious edifices, the styles denominated Saxon and Norman, from which the Gothic had its origin, were universally practised. As the distinctive features of these styles may be interesting to the Antiquary, we shall borrow descriptions of their peculiarities.*

‘The Saxons generally built their churches in the form of the Basilica, consisting of an oblong, with a portico and ambulatory, with the principal entrance at the west end. Some years afterwards additions were

* Oxford Encyc. vol. 2, p. 536.

made to complete the form of the cross, and during the latter years of the Saxon dominion, the west front and the centre of the cross were ornamented with towers. The outer walls which were extremely thick, had no buttresses; and within the churches were three stories occupied by the arcade, gallery, and windows. The pillars were short and round, the arches all semi-circular, and the principal door-cases adorned with pillars and carved capitals. The moulding round the arches consisted either of the indented shapes or small squares, alternately deeper flourished, which were always accompanied by the billet or a kind of torus. On the capitals of their pillars small beads were usually placed, and on some of the latest works a carving resembling a trellis in broad lozenges. The base moulding and capitals though in general similar, and correct in their dimensions, differed very much in their minuter parts. The Saxon architecture may be distinctly seen in particular parts of many buildings, though there are very few edifices remaining which are entirely in that style.

The Saxons probably borrowed their style from those Roman buildings which had escaped their ruthless warfare; and sent to France and Italy for the artificers of their buildings. The Norman style which succeeded was a manifest improvement upon the heavy and ponderous features of the Saxon. Previous to their invasion of England this people had erected some magnificent structures in their own country, and therefore added experience to their own natural genius. 'Their style, though in many respects similar to that of the Saxons, differed from it in the greater dimensions of their buildings, in having more lofty and plain vaulting, circular

pillars of greater diameter, round arches and capitals, with more richly ornamented carvings; but both were destitute of pediments and pinnacles. The period of the Norman architecture extends from the conquest in 1066 to the death of Stephen in 1154. The edifices in every part of the kingdom have verified the industry of these people, and the fifteen cathedrals, whose origin can be clearly ascertained, bear all decided marks of Norman architecture about them. The intersection of arches, producing the appearance of the pointed arch, has been supposed to have given rise to the style afterwards denominated Gothic.

‘ In the course of the reign of Stephen the arches began to be slightly pointed; and the tall slender pillar gradually supplanted the heavy round one, and the lancet or sharply-pointed arch was introduced, though many of the same ornaments continued in use. The cathedrals of Westminster, Salisbury, and Ely, erected in the reign of Henry III., are proofs of the perfection of elegance which this style had attained. This style is particularly distinguished by its pillars, sometimes bound by fillets at certain distances, and insulated or clustered together into a single column, with narrow lancet windows, and cross upon cross springers; the windows in some instances were in three lights, and all the arches sharply pointed. * * * The style of architecture was again entirely changed in the fifteenth century. The walls were made very high and thin, the towers ornamented with panelled arcades, and the pinnacles and parapets formed of open embattled work. The vaultings of the roof were formed into pendants of curious workmanship, and made to unite with the groins

formed by the arches over the windows. Images of angels with musical instruments were introduced over the altar instead of architectural imitations of leaves. The cloisters, which had hitherto been made quite plain, had their roofs covered with tracery, and their windows filled with painted glass. The rich variety of ornaments, the extent of painted glass, the peculiarity of the roof, and the delicacy of the workmanship which characterize this style, all conspire to excite the greatest admiration.'

Architecture having undergone these speedy and manifest changes, most of the ancient churches of the country present a mixture of the Saxon, Norman, and Gothic styles, with frequently but little uniformity of arrangement. Wisbech Church is particularly irregular in its style of architecture.

The steeple is placed at the west end, adjoining to the north nave and baptistry. It has been considered elegant by some persons, and is thought to have been built subsequently to the other part of the church, about the year 1520. Several records of donations towards its erection, both from the Guild and also private individuals, have reached us; the amount of such contributions does not exceed the sum of £30. which was collected at separate times. Cole thinks that Bishop Morton was the founder, between 1520 and 1530. He writes 'had not the initials T. M. occurred on the tower, I should have judged it to have been erected at the expense of Cardinal John Morton, first bishop of Ely, and afterwards Archbishop of Canterbury, who, while bishop of Ely, built a great part of the old castle of Wisbech, and according to Camden and Goodwyn did other

great and beneficial works in this part of the Isle. However, as the Archiepiscopal arms of the see of Canterbury are there also with those of Ely, and both impaling the same coat, I can fix it to no person so like as the said Cardinal Archbishop.'

The same individual proceeds to describe the ornaments on this tower, as follows:—'On the north side of the tower nearly at the top are these devices, viz.:—In the middle are the royal arms of France and England in a large shield supported by an angel under a canopy, above this at the two corners are a text T and an M crowned, and at the two bottom corners under the T the arms of the see of Canterbury. It is mitred as is also the other which is under the M, and has a coat of arms quarterly; but whether those of Cardinal Morton I cannot take upon myself to determine. On the ridge immediately under the pinnacle are these arms in a shield, viz.:—Two keys in saltire (being the emblem of St. Peter), and on that below the window which is just under the aforesaid are seven shields:—first, France and England;—second, uncertain;—third, two cross keys;—fourth, the arms of the see of Ely supported by an angel;—fifth, two swords in saltire (the emblem of St. Paul);—sixth, uncertain;—seventh, supposed to be Ely impaling Morton, and mitred. Below all these on the corners of the arch of the belfry door are two other shields with—first, two keys in saltire, and second, two swords in saltire. [The emblems of St. Peter and St. Paul, as ante-mentioned.]

'The arms on the west side of the tower are as follows: in the middle the bishoprick of Ely supported by an angel; under a canopy in the *dexter* corner above

is a mitred shield of Ely impaling Morton, as I guess; in the *sinister* corner is a book opened, and in the two bottom ones are coats quarterly as above mentioned.

‘On the south side at the top are these shields, viz.: in the middle J. H. S. supported by an angel and under a canopy. The two uppermost shields are on one side of three cups, and on the other is the cup and wafer; third are three stars;—fourth, a cross;—and quite at the top, the two swords in saltire.

‘On the east front in the middle, under a canopy supported by an angel, is the cup and wafers; and above it are the keys and swords in saltire. Under the keys is the emblem of St. James:—the pilgrim’s staff, to which hangs in the middle the scrip and two scallop shells. Under the swords is the emblem of St. Catherine;—a sword, and on each side of it a Catherine wheel. Above them all, on the ridge immediately under the pinnacles, are the arms of the see of Ely.’*

The most elegant portion of the steeple is the upper part where these various arms and emblems are placed, and the pinnacles. Within the pinnacles, which are of the most handsome description of Gothic tracery, is a mean leaden spire. The middle of the steeple is on each side ornamented with a belt of fine carved work, and the bottom is also encircled with a similar screed of rich sculpture.

The belfry contains ten bells; there were formerly only eight, (the oldest of them bearing the date of 1566) which were re-cast, and two new bells presented to the public by the late vicar, Abraham Jobson, D. D.

* From the M.SS. of the Rev. W. Cole, mentioned in Note p. 139.

whose public-spirited liberality we shall frequently have occasion to refer to. They were completed in the year 1823, but the ceremony of baptism which was constantly performed with regular sponsors in the middle ages, and is still continued in catholic countries, was of course dispensed with.

The stranger on entering Wisbech church is first and most forcibly struck with the many galleries, which appear around him without either order or arrangement—there are no less than seven. Over the south nave is an upper one, built by the late Vicar, the Rev. A. Jobson, D. D., the lower one was built by the Corporation, and presented to Secretary Thurloe. Over the north nave are also two, one behind the other. Besides these there are the cross galleries at each end of both aisles: those in front of the chancel and altar exhibit a heavy appearance, and completely conceal that part of the church, and also the principal monuments.

Immediately over the altar is a window of painted glass. The custom of placing these gorgeous channels of light in churches and cathedrals was an invention of the gothic era. It certainly accords in every respect with the holy, simple, and yet commanding features of that style of architecture, and was an invention worthy of the age. Its magnificence is richly religious, and though the light glides through its panes in 'fervid streams of rainbow glory,'* still there is a deep and

* 'The light that pours its fervid streams
Of rainbow glory, down through arch and aisle.'

Mrs. Hemans.

solemn beauty in its gaiety of color. The vivid glare of day is compressed into every hue which dissipates gloom and sanctifies whatever it touches. Dr. Burrough, a former vicar, presented this window to the church, which, though small, adds considerably to the beauty of the chancel.

Notwithstanding the apparent spaciousness of the church and the many galleries with which it is studded, the accommodation for the inhabitants is very contracted, and many of the seats have been transformed to make more room; it was at this transformation that some thin copper coins and a curious floor of flat glazed tiles were found. 'One of the coins' says Col. Watson, 'has the words Wisbitch H T I on one side, and Henry Tunard with the bakers' arms on the other. On another of the coins are the words 'King's Lynn Farthing, 1669,' with a sort of arms on the reverse. The tiles so found were flat, about three-quarters of an inch in thickness, and four inches square; on the surface, glazed, with a bar dividing six crosslets, is a well-defined shield.'

The chamber over the porch at the south-west entrance nearest to the vicarage is supposed to have been in the first instance appropriated as a depositary for the vessels, books of office, and vestments used in the church, and afterwards contained the bows, arrows, and other warlike implements which each parish was bound to provide for the public safety. It is now, however, used as a library, and contains a valuable collection of books. It appears that it originated with a number of individuals in the town who formed themselves into a Literary Society, and a 'list of the books of the club' forms part of the catalogue deposited in the library;

but in consequence of the great increase in the number of the books, application was made to the capital burgesses to provide some place for their reception on their being dedicated to the public, and by the following document we perceive that this chamber was expressly fitted up for the purpose.

‘Imprimis the Capital Burgesses of the Towne of Wisbech, for the advancement of piety and encouragement of learning, did, with one assent and consent, order this chamber to bee prepared and furnished with shelves and other necessaryes for a Library out of the Towne Stocke.’

A list is also preserved of the individuals who contributed to the library by donation of books, between the years 1734. and 1774, and the names of Henry Pierson, Gentleman; Algernon Peyton, D. D.; Mr. Bell, of Beaupre Hall; and Secretary Thurloe, appear pre-eminent above the rest for the number and value of their presentations.

Many of the books are very valuable, particularly the Polyglott Bible and Montfauçon’s Antiquities; there are also some illuminated manuscripts put together in the antique fashion of the times literally ‘in boards.’ The works principally consist of Treatises on Divinity and Ecclesiastical History, and amongst the number are the Epistles of the learned and pious Melancthon,—of Augustine, Calvin, and Tertullian, and of Irenæus, Cyprian, Ignatius, and Gregory. Some of the works of Camden, Selden, Grotius, Erasmus, Galen, Hippocrates, and Aristotle, and also of Fuller, Bull, Whitgift, Hammond, and Hooker. Amongst the classical authors we find Xenophon, Ovid, Cicero, Pliny, Celsus, Ense-

bius, Thucydides, Herodotus, Demosthenes, Tacitus, Livy, Cæsar, Homer, and Hesiod.

The capital burgesses appoint the librarian, who is usually the master of the grammar school; and any inhabitant can have access to the library and the use of the books on application to him.

It is surprising that this library is so very seldom resorted to, and indeed there are not many individuals in the town who are acquainted even with its existence. The attention of the capital burgesses was called to it in the year 1830, and a committee was appointed for the purpose of examining the state of the books, of enquiring into its original foundation, and of devising some plan for rendering it more easy of access, and serviceable to the inhabitants of the town. A strong wish existed with some members of the corporation to make it the foundation of an extensive parochial library, which would be attended with very considerable advantage to the public if it were established upon well-regulated principles, and the books properly and judiciously selected; but there appeared to be no plan which they could find sufficiently matured to accomplish the desirable object which they had in view. We hope, however, that when the new grammar school is erected, a room will be expressly built for the purpose of a parochial library, and should not the funds of the corporation be adequate to accomplish it, that subscriptions will be raised in aid of its resources, and we then think that the capital burgesses would not object, nor the vicar, should he possess the power to do so, to the removal of the library from the church, for the purpose of extending its usefulness, and forming a foundation of one upon a larger scale.

The organ stands against the west wall at the end of the north nave, and fronts the altar. On the lower part of the cornice of the gallery the following inscription is written in gold letters:—*This Organ was built Anno 1711, (C. Quarles, Cantab, fecit.) by voluntary contributions.* It appears from records in our possession, that this fine instrument was but little used until the year 1787, when it was resolved at a public vestry that it should be put into a complete state of repair; and the inhabitants being unable to pay a sufficient and permanent salary to the organist, application was made to the Capital Burgesses to subscribe any sum they might think proper out of the revenues of the town for that purpose. At a meeting of the Capital Burgesses held on the 3rd of August, 1787, it was agreed, that a sum of money not exceeding forty pounds a year should be appropriated for the salary of the organist, as soon as the organ should be properly repaired, provided that the nomination of the organist should be left to and deemed vested in the Corporation. The organ was accordingly put into a proper state of repair at the expense of £500. by Mr. Samuel Green, of London, whose name with the date of 1789, is affixed to it; the Corporation, aided by the judgment of Dr. Randall of Cambridge, elected the late Mr. George Guest as organist, and in the year 1809 his salary was increased from £40. to £50. per annum. For several years previously to 1830 there existed a strong feeling in the town amongst an extensive class of persons against the appropriation of any part of the corporation funds towards the salary of the organist, but the Capital Burgesses, in consequence of the faithful and long-continued services of Mr. Guest,

and taking into consideration the terms on which he originally received the appointment, did not think it equitable to deprive him of his accustomed income, but on his death which occurred in the following year, (1831) they discontinued the payment, and the salary has since been raised by public subscription. The organ is still much neglected, no skilful person being engaged regularly to keep it in order; it is, however, a very fine and powerful instrument; the diapason and flute stops are remarkably fine, and it might at a trifling expense be very considerably improved by the addition of pedal pipes.

It has often been with us a matter of regret that the plan adopted in Holland, and indeed at all the principal churches on the continent, is not resorted to in this country. There the organist regularly attends once a week for an hour or two in the afternoon or evening, and plays some of the compositions of the most celebrated masters, and the churches being opened to the public, many thus acquire a knowledge of music and a taste for this polished science which they would not otherwise have the opportunity of doing. The effect of good music tends to harmonize and soften the natural character of the heart, and the mind is exercised in real feelings of devotion when the organ sends forth the loud anthem and hallelujahs through the temple of the High God.

We have witnessed scenes of this description at Rotterdam, Haarlem, Cologne, and at Paris in the church of Notre Dame, and have watched the intense anxiety and gratification exhibited by the parties attending on such occasions, although numbers of them walked in the lower classes of life, for music requires not the aid

of refined learning to render it intelligible to man, it speaks a language which is understood and felt by all, and we confess that we have never listened to the modulation of this most noble of all instruments in the cadences of the 'divine Haydn,' without cherishing feelings that have 'less of earth in them than heaven'—feelings which we trust will attend us to the latest hours of our existence.

We quote a few passages descriptive of the interior of the church from Mr. Cole's MS.:—'At the end of the north aisle (which is much larger though not so broad as the other,) is the altar; it stands on an eminence of three steps, and is handsomely railed in. Behind it, and as far as the rails, the wall is neatly wainscotted, and the altar-piece gilt with the Lord's prayer, the ten commandments, and creed, and about them are also several sentences from the New Testament concerning the communion. * * *

'Four pillars divide the two naves from each other, and six pillars separate the north nave from the north aisle. The pulpit stands against the second pillar on the north side, and has a glory I H S on the front of it. * * The poor's box which stands against the last pillar on the north as you enter the church, has this inscription carved on it, 'Remember the Poor. 1639.'*

* It is not perhaps generally known that these boxes were originally provided in compliance with the provisions of an Act of Parliament. The Act of 27th Henry 8th, c. 25, (1536) requires that every Preacher, Parson, Vicar, and Curate, as well in their sermons, collections, bidding of the beads as in the time of confession, and making of wills, is to exhort, move, stir, and provoke people to be liberal for

* * At the bottom of the north aisle runs a screen from the door to the opposite pillar, in which division is the largest altar monument I ever saw, being a prodigious piece of grey marble on a stone pediment; the piece of brass of a small size at the head of it is now lost, therefore it is uncertain for whom this tomb was intended. In the different cross-beams of this north aisle are these six several coats cut in the oak, in shield;—first, the cup and wafers in a glory;—second, the same;—third, a mitre on a fess inter three cocks, (which I take to be designed for the arms of John Alcock, bishop of Ely, who died here in 1500);—fourth, two swords;—fifth, two keys;—sixth, the arms of the see of Ely, (three crowns). Against the east end of this aisle in a frame, hangs the following list of benefactors, viz.:—

A CATALOGUE OF THE PRINCIPAL BENEFACTORS TO THE
TOWN OF WISBECH.

KING EDWARD the Sixth gave the Charter.

KING JAMES the First renewed it.

KING CHARLES the Second confirmed it.

MRS. JACOMIN STURMIN gave £100. to build the Corn Market House; and £100. to build Alms Houses for poor Widows.

the relief of the impotent, and directs that the money collected should be kept in a common box in the church to be delivered to the poor as necessity might require.

And in order to prevent the vagrancy of strangers, almsgiving otherwise than to these common boxes, or common gathering for fellow parishioners, or prisoners is prohibited by forfeiture of ten times the amount given.

MR. W. SCOTTREL gave the Rent of 12 Acres of Land to the Poor for ever.

THOS. PARKE, Esq. gave 100 Marks to mend the Highways; and the House called the Wrestlers for the benefit of the Poor; and 104 Marks per Annum to maintain 4 Fellows and 4 Scholars at Cambridge, in St. Peter's College.

DR. HAWKINS gave £300. to build 6 Alms Houses.

MR. WM. HOLMES gave £400. to maintain 2 Scholars at Cambridge; and £300. to be a standing Stock to be Let to Poor Tradesmen £10. each for three years without Interest.

MRS. MARY MIDDLECOAT gave 40s. per Annum for 6 Sermons on the 6 Wednesdays in Lent.

MR. ROBERT LOUIK gave 6 Acres in St. John's, for preaching every Wednesday between Easter and Whitsuntide.

MRS. ETHELRED PARKES gave 15 Acres in Emneth to pay £7. yearly, for a Sermon on the Holy Days; and 5 Acres in Wisbech to clothe three poor Widows yearly; and a Mark for a Sermon at the Commemoration.

JOHN CRANE, Esq. enlarged the School House; he built a Pair of Stairs in the Corn Market; he gave the House called the Bull, to increase the Schoolmaster's Stipend, and to buy Corn and Coals for the Poor; he gave £30. to enlarge the Town Hall, and to build a Chamber over it; and £60. every year till £200. Stock be raised, and then to be lent to poor Tradesmen £20. each for 20 years without

Interest, and afterwards for the relief of poor Persons and other Poor; and 40s. in every fifth year for preaching at the Commemoration.

WILLIAM LORD SAY AND SEAL gave £100.—the Interest is to clothe poor People yearly.

WM. GIRLING gave 40s. in every tenth year to the Poor of this Parish.

RICHARD RORSK gave 16 Acres to buy a Piece of Plate for the Church, and then to clothe two Widows yearly against Christmas; and 5s. to the Town Bailiff.

MR. RICHARD LEAKE gave £100.—the Interest is to clothe six poor Widows or Housekeepers, yearly; he gave £100.—the Interest is to be disposed of—20s. every Christmas to pious poor People that shall receive the Sacrament; and 10s. every Wednesday between Ember week and Easter, yearly, to such pious poor Housekeepers as shall come to Church.

JOHN THURLOWE, Esq. procured the Interest of £150. to put out three poor Apprentices yearly; he gave £50. to make a Causeway; and £46. 10s. to make a Sluice; and £50. to the Library.

‘The south gallery is of wainscot finely veneered and carved, especially on the side towards the nave, which is supported by four iron pillars gilt. This gallery is built under the arch which separates the nave from the chancel. Under the same arch and above the gallery towards the nave are the king’s arms, beautifully carved and gilt, with ‘1660 C. R. 2.’ The south chancel is

not so long but wider than the other, from which it is separated by two stone pillars which stand on the upper step of the north chancel. * * * The roof of the south chancel is higher than the north one, as is the roof of the south nave than that of the adjoining one. The roofs of the two chancels are arched, whereas those of the naves are flat, but all are wainscotted. * * In the middle window of this chancel is part of a coat of arms, but the two base quarters, as I take it, are gone, and now filled up by some body with these letters and date — ‘J. B. 1587.’ I take these arms to be the same as those in the east window at Haddenham church, which belong to Thomas Arundel, Archbishop of Canterbury. At the bottom of the middle aisle of this south nave stands the stone font on three steps, and covered with a fine gilt and carved spiral crown.’

The division of the north aisle from its nave is by a row of Saxon pillars, the characteristics of which we have before described to be their lowness, their connection by a circular arch, and the general massiveness of their proportions. This part of the church appears incontestibly to be the oldest, and these pillars are a material evidence of its antiquity. The description, however, which we have given, conveys a general idea of the interior as it appeared some years since, and no material alteration has occurred to induce us to enlarge much upon the observations we have transcribed; for churches, unlike the changeable character of other edifices, preserve the same aspect from age to age, as if man feared to remove one single stone of the consecrated temple in which the prayers of his forefathers in every affliction and distress had been offered up to heaven.

These unvarying features also give a sanctity to the place, which would be overwhelmed by the continual progress of renovation. As we step over that threshold worn by the tread of generations, and see around us the gloomy mementos of death, with nothing to recall our thoughts to the living world, how lonely, yet how eloquent—how solemn, yet how deeply interesting is the scene.* The venerable sternness of age is apparent wherever we turn,—the very air seems to have caught the icy chiliness of death as it sweeps along the darkened aisles,—the foot falls upon the pavement with a strangely-echoing sound, and we seem to hold a secret fellowship with the dead: yet there is a light that struggles dimly through the narrow and cumbrous window that lifts the eye to heaven, and we feel that there is a world, a happy world, beyond the grave and the dark valley of the shadow of death reserved for us after our weary pilgrimage is done. Though pomp even here strives to make itself visible, and to mitigate the solemnity with its fanciful shapes, yet how distinct is its character from the pretension and arrogance it assumes in the bustle of the world!—who envies the

* The most celebrated lyric poetess that England—we had almost said that the world—ever produced, the elegant and accomplished Mrs. Hemans, has thus commemorated her feelings under similar circumstances:—

‘ Speak low!—the place is holy to the breath
Of awful harmonies—of whispered prayer:
Tread lightly!—for the sanctity of death,
Broods with a voiceless influence on the air.’

Songs of the Affections, (page 165.)

grandeur of a monument or the unliving dignity of an escutcheon? Can any thing be more humbling than the grave of the great and the noble?—Is there in all the maxims of philosophy a precept more moral than the simplest epitaph?—‘Pathos,’ exclaims one of the most delightful writers of the present day, ‘pathos expires under the slow labor of the chisel, and is chilled among the cold conceits of sculptured marble.’ But this is a subject which might be infinitely extended, and for which we might gather associations from every feeling and every scene. Its relevance to this work may, however, be questioned, and we therefore proceed with our historical detail.

We will now supply a description of the remaining part of the church and the monuments of the dead, and at every step that we take we are reminded that ‘the place whereon we stand is holy ground.’

It is perhaps to be regretted that the inscriptions on the compartments of the east window commemorating the floods of 1613, &c. which have formerly been transcribed, should have been erased to make room for the monument to the memory of Edward Southwell, Esq. Such commemorations are in many respects interesting as well as singular, and give a reverence and dignity to the places where they are found. Some latin verses probably on the same event were inserted on the middle compartment, and deserve preservation.

D. O. M. S.

O frugum fœcunda domus nimiumque beata,

Si male vicinis non premereris aquis.

Quas, tu cum sedeas imis in vallibus, a te

Quis prohibere undas, ni deus ipse potest?

Z.

Scilicet in fluctus nequicquam tenditur agger, '
 Atque infida suo sedet arena mari.
 Quod si te impietas, fraudes, scortatio, fædus,
 Commaculant, ab aquis cur velet ista deus?

Posuit Joshua Blaxton in theologia Baccalaureus &
 hujus ecclesiæ, dignus vicarius.

The following is an attempt at translation; but in it
 the classic reader will perceive we have used the original
 with much freedom:—

Divine abode, how blessed were such a dome,
 Should the flood's ravage shun thy sacred walls,
 And nature, in her hour of deluge-gloom
 Leave thee to fate,—which spares whilst it appals.
 But who, save Heaven, may guard thee from the storm,
 When dark and dreadful swells the vengeful wave?
 Will thy huge century-blackened bulwarks form
 A citadel to stem, protect, and save?
 Alas! in vain is man's presumptuous power.—
 The mole shall crumble in the wasting flood.—
 And the strong temple in God's angry hour,
 Sink at thy stain—Impiety and fraud.

We have only now to notice and transcribe the few
 interesting monuments which adorn the walls of this
 church. The first in antiquity and interest is that of
 Thomas de Branstone, who was constable of the castle
 in the latter part of the fourteenth century. This monu-
 ment lies in the south aisle. It is a large marble, on
 which under a Gothic canopy partly broken away, is
 the brass effigy of a man in plate armour with a lion at
 his feet. The inscription in old french is written around
 the outer edge of the stone, thus:—‘ Cy gist Thomas de
 Braunstone jadiz Conestable du Chatel de Wisebeche,

qui moruit le vingt septieme jour de Maii, l'an de notre seignour, mil cccc primer. D l'alme de qui Dieu par sa grace ait mercy. Amen.'

Near the altar on the north wall of the chancel, are two very elaborate monuments to the memories of Thomas Parke and Matthias Taylor, Esqrs. That of Taylor must at one time have been very gorgeous, though its tarnished and worn gilding now sadly displays its perishable glory. It is of marble and consists of two figures—a man in a flowing-sleeved garment, with his wife kneeling at a desk which is between them, and is under an arch supported by two corinthian columns entirely gilt. At the top between two spires are the arms, and above them on a death's head, is an hour-glass, and over that a pair of scales. Under the male figure on a gold ground, is an inscription to the memory of Matthias Taylor, Esq., who is stated to have been one of the ten Capital Burgesses for the town of Wisbech, and for twenty years before his death Justice of the Peace for the Isle of Ely. He died in 1633, aged 67 years.

The other monument to the memory of Parke is nearly of similar construction: it is of marble and alabaster, and also consists of two figures kneeling before a desk which is between them. The man is in armour, and the woman in black; their arms being placed as in the former monument. The following lines are at the top:—

'To the memory of their dear and deceased father Thomas Parke, Esq. and Audine Parke, their mother yet living.' 'Sir Miles Sandys, Knight, and Dame Elizabeth his wife, daughter and heir of the said Thomas Parke, erected this monument.

Beneath is the following inscription:—

‘The said Thomas Parke was born of a worthy family in the county of Huntingdon, who, through the blessing of God upon his ingenious endeavours, arose to an ample estate, and to be Justice of the Peace in the Isle of Ely for many years; and the year before his death he was High Sheriff of the counties of Cambridge and Huntingdon. Out of all these blessings he gave good relief to the poor in his lifetime, and by his last will many large legacies to charitable uses,—who lived religiously, virtuously, and generously, to the age of 87 years, and died on the 1st day of January, 1630.’

Within the chancel rails is a monument to the memory of Thomas Edwards, Esq. Chief Bailiff of the Isle,* who died on the 15th of July, 1805.

Against the east wall and near the south, is a neat white marble, with arms at the top, to the memory of Sarah Buckworth. At the head of the Constable's tomb are two marbles; the one on the left side having a space for a small brass for the inscription, with the cup and wafers above it, which shews that it belongs to some priest. At the bottom of this aisle beneath the gallery, are three other tablets, belonging to the Bludwick family; and one to Henry Cashynurs, who died the 10th of May, 1682.

Before the pulpit is a very large marble, but the figures, which apparently consisted of a man and his wife with a label and a scroll, are effaced. Three other monuments or rather slabs, are in the same mutilated state.

* A list of the Chief Bailiffs will be found in the Appendix.

Under the monument to Parke is a white marble tablet to the memory of Thomas Pierson, Gent. (who it will be recollected was a benefactor to the library,) and Jane his wife; and near to this on a large free-stone, is an inscription to the memory of Jane, the wife of A. Balom, Esq. who died 1699. Under the north stalls a little removed from this, is a large black marble slab, with the arms of the Southwell family; and various other slabs and inscriptions belonging to the Bellamy, Southwell, Stevens, Worrell, Taylor, Heton, Challis, Cross, Thorey, Hardwicke, Trinnes, Caldwell, Hanner, and Hemstone families.

Between two windows in the north wall, an elegant mural monument of white marble partly gilt, perpetuates the memory of William Caldwell, Prebend of Ely, 1702.

The various monuments of the Southwell family are very rich and elegant, and one over the door of the south chancel has a very chaste and airy figure of Hope, said to be from the chisel of Nollekens, the most celebrated sculptor of the last age. The figure bears every evidence of the workmanship of a masterly hand.

Near this monument, also, we notice the record and remains of a curious bequest to the church. Where the old altar stood, upon an antique gothic desk, are the fragments of three old books, with the following inscription on the wainscot:—

‘ Robert Goodridge, son of James Goodridge, blacksmith, born in Wisbech St. Peters—deceased in London on Easter-day, in the year 1635; and gave by his last will and testament, eight pounds to buy these three Books of Martyrs, and to have them set in the church

of Wisbech aforesaid; which was performed according to his will, in the year of our Lord 1636, by Thomas Harrison the elder, and ——— churchwardens, and Richard Tassell, '*Tifer*,' in trust. This work was finished in the second year of Edward Turninge Clerk, M. A. vicar of this parish.'

This chancel is also much adorned with monuments and mural inscriptions. Among the various names we notice Cook, Roberts, Ardin, Stevens, Vallery, North, Burges, Finch, Pinkes, Hepburn, Ryland, &c. One inscription to the memory of George Worrall, Gent. and his family, states that his wife was related to Queens Mary and Anne. Several achievements to the Southwell families also adorn the wall which terminates this chancel.

The monument to Nicholas Sanford is in this part of the church. At the top are his arms, and on a large piece of brass below, the following inscription:—'Here lieth interred the body of Nicholas Sanford, Gent., descended from the ancient and religious house of Sanford Hall, in Shropshire, who departed this life on the 14th February, 1638, aged 75 years.' And after commemorating the death of his wife 'daughter of Reignold Hall,' is the following distich which we have before alluded to:

' He was
' A pattern for townsmen whom we may enroll,
' For at his own charge this town he freed of toll.'

The baptistry, which was formerly a chantry, contains many monuments, among which are the names of Wood, Chas. Vavazor, Sir Philip Vavazor, Peter East,

and Alice Watson, the mother of the late Col. Watson, whose remains lie in the same place.

Among the more recent monuments and slabs in the church, are those to the memory of Hannah, the wife of Abraham Jobson, D. D., William Rayner, Esq., and Elizabeth his wife, Catherine Girdlestone, Rev. Zacharial Stichall, A. M., and Hannah and Christian Frazer, daughters of Alexander Frazer, M. D., who died in 1822 and 1823, having fallen victims to consumption at the early ages of 19 and 21.

The various other monuments that have been enumerated may excite the interest of the antiquary, but we confess that this last simple tablet always claims our first and firmest attention, not only from the chaste simplicity and elegance of its diction, but from the emotions that it naturally awakens in the heart,—here the fond parent can never fail to shed a tear—a sister that knows the value of such an endearing relationship will yield to sympathy,—and the friend whose firm and secret bond of union is stronger and more lasting than any other earthly tie, will never look with an eye of indifference on this one single tomb that is recorded to contain the remains of two sisters prematurely* snatched away (well might the parent thus exclaim in his wild anguish of feeling,) ‘by one lingering disease.’

We never look upon the monuments to the young but we imagine that we see in them the strongest possible evidencet of a future state—we feel that they are re-

* Eodem morbo heu prematurè abruptas,
Idem sepulcrum continet.

† ‘Honoro in cineribus scæmina æternitatis,’ says St. Ambrose.

‘I honor in our ashes the seeds of eternity.’

moved from a weary pilgrimage, and are become as angels in heaven. Had there been no other argument in favor of an eternity, this would to our humble minds, be sufficiently powerful and satisfactory; and if the man whose mind is tainted with infidelity were more frequently to commune with himself near the graves of the departed—the silent confines of the tomb,—he would soon cast off his cloak of infidelity, and feel, conscientiously feel, the reality of this religious truth.

We have now completed our description of the church, and it has always been with us a subject for regret that the house of prayer and thanksgiving was ever suffered to be used as a public cemetery. The custom has been of very long continuance. We find that in the earliest ages of christianity the privilege was granted only to the remains of those who had suffered martyrdom in the cause of religion, and the great Emperor Constantine sought but permission that his body might be interred in the porch of the basilica of the apostles, which he had himself erected in Constantinople.* Bishops, Priests, and other learned and pious persons were afterwards gradually permitted to have their graves within the sanctuary, but it is at the present day opened to almost all classes of persons, and we fear that as long as the parties who should act as faithful guardians to this most holy ground have a pecuniary interest in disposing of the imagined privilege, so long will the system be allowed to continue, and the church be converted into a charnel-house for the dead.

The cemetery that surrounds the church presents but

* Eustace's Classical Tour in Italy, 8vo. vol. 2, c. 10.

little that is worthy of notice and less that is worthy of approbation; since we never noticed a spot consecrated as a burial place, so ill adapted to its holy purposes: it is intersected in all directions by public paths, and is the scene of perpetual desecration. We do not rank amongst that class of philosophers who treat with indifference their place of interment, or the disposition of their earthly remains, for we have watched with considerable attention the opinions of many persons, and we never heard a good and pious man assume a false and stoical heroism on this subject, and so far from betraying an indifference as to the mode of his sepulture, we have repeatedly heard him express a wish like the patriarchs and prophets of old,—(whose feelings on this subject we delight in dwelling upon as they are beautifully recorded in holy writ)—that his bones might repose near to those of his relatives and friends, and he has exclaimed in the language of the pious and affectionate Ruth, ‘Where thou diest I will die, and there will I be buried.’

The church yard is not only perpetually used as a public thoroughfare, but the graves are placed so near to each other that the human frame is scarcely suffered to become decomposed before it is disturbed: the plan adopted in the Campo Santo* at Naples, of having a cemetery for every day in the year where the bodies are cast without distinction, is far preferable to the constant scenes of exhumation that are here so frequently exhibited to our view. A new burial ground has lately

* See Eustace and also Carne's Letters from Italy and Switzerland, 8vo. 1834, p. 374. et seq.

been provided, and we could wish that the plan of planting it were resorted to. It is singular that this custom which is now becoming very general in England, should long since have been adopted by a people so dull and unenlightened as the Turks; they invariably, we are told, have their cemeteries without the precincts of their cities, frequently on a rising eminence, and always planted with cedars, cypresses, and odoriferous shrubs, whose deep verdure and graceful form bending to every breeze, bear a melancholy beauty, and impress upon the mind most forcibly the solemnity of the place, and the purpose to which it is destined.

We are pleased that Wisbech in the absence of all historical associations and of those of the beauties of nature, retains one custom which has been handed down through a period of eight hundred years,—we refer to the tolling of the curfew at nine o'clock every evening. There is something of the simplicity of olden times and the pathos of memory in the slow clanging tones of this bell pealing over the landscape on a summer's evening. As we have listened to its musical and melancholy notes in the deep and still twilight, we have thought of the times that have intervened since its first sound hushed the busy toils and transient importance of day, of what revolutions have come over the mind of man and the face of society, and the change that has transformed this country from a forsaken waste to a blooming garden. There are not many towns in England that retain this custom, and the number is gradually becoming less; in a few years we shall probably have lost this last relic of antiquity which Wisbech can boast: but whilst Gray's immortal Elegy, and Milton's Il'

Penseroso survive, the curfew will never cease to 'swing with sullen roar' as it 'tolls the knell of parting day.'*

A kind of matin-bell is tolled in the morning at five o'clock, and chimed at six: although it awakens but few to enjoy the glorious sight of the rising sun.

The church, notwithstanding its apparent extent, is very inadequate to the accommodation of the public—a population of 9000; indeed 1800 persons is as many as it can be made to hold, with all the increase of space which has been lately given, at the cost of upwards of £3000. by the erection of galleries, and the transforming of seats. This serious evil had long engaged the attention of the inhabitants, as well as that of Dr. Jobson, the late vicar. At length the vicar, with a beneficence seldom exceeded, proposed a Chapel of Ease, and offered for its endowment an estate exceeding £5000. in value. The inhabitants immediately took this spirited and munificent offer into serious consideration, and by co-operating with him, effectually secured the advantage. The vicar again displayed the interest which he took in the success of the undertaking by

* It is commonly supposed that the Curfew was first introduced at the time of William the Conqueror, but its origin is considerably earlier since we find that it was an ancient custom amongst the Convents of the North to put out their fires on the ringing of a bell. See Lord Lyttleton's History of Henry II, p. 490; Dr. Warton's Essay on Pope, p. 22; and also Lacombe in V Couvrefeu. William the Conqueror, however, made the custom general in England by ordaining a law with severe penalties that every one should put out his lights and fires on the ringing of the bell at eight o'clock in the evening. This law was abolished in 1100 by Henry I.

subscribing twenty shares to the amount of £1000. for the building, and in a short time £6500. more was subscribed by the inhabitants, a sum, which, though considerably above the estimate and deemed by all adequate to the undertaking, proved insufficient. However, after various delays, the work was completed in 1830, having been commenced in 1827, and the chapel is able to accommodate 1000 persons. The height to the top of the lantern is 88 feet, and the inner length 102 feet. It is built in the form of an octagon, with a lantern of the same form at the top. We cannot pronounce such a design at all beautiful; it does not combine that sacred dignity which ought to be observed in erections of this kind.

The vicar stipulated that the right to the first presentation should be exercised by himself, and that afterwards it should devolve upon the subscribers or their representatives. A minister who is far removed from the limits of three-score years and ten, has been presented by the vicar; and if it has effected no other good, it has, as far as the ordinary calculations of human life can be our guide, been the means of defeating the latent views of any of the subscribers, who might have engaged in the undertaking for the purpose of converting it into a piece of prospective family patronage.

There is a clause in the Act of Parliament passed for erecting and endowing this Chapel of Ease, which has always given us considerable pain whenever our attention has been called to the subject;—after defining with rather singular accuracy the duties of the minister, it directs that he shall visit the sick of the Town of

Wisbech, and administer private baptism when duly required, in such division and district thereof as shall be from time to time fixed and appointed by the Bishop of the Diocese of Ely for the time being. Now if there be one part of the duties of the clergy that is more serviceable, and that conveys more real comfort than another, or where the duties less require the limits and bounds of episcopal prescription, it is that of visiting the sick. When we know, and feel, or imagine that we feel, by some secret yet spirit-stirring admonition, that our days are numbered, or where we are gradually sinking beneath the power of some lingering disease, then is the time that we value the privilege of selecting a minister to read, converse, and pray with us, whose doctrines we approve of, and whose piety we revere: and must we be debarred from calling in this cheering guide in our afflictions because some parochial boundary has been fixed, or some rigid line of demarcation has been marked out as the exclusive sphere of usefulness for the universal minister of God? If this holy duty were more universally sought out, and attended to by our spiritual pastors, no petty feeling of jealousy as to local jurisdiction would ever exist; but they would gladly solicit others to come over and help them: and wherever the couch of the dying man were placed, there would be found some faithful minister enforcing the necessity of repentance and faith, and pointing out the only path to Heaven.

CHAPTER VIII.

Grammar School and other Public Institutions.

IN perusing the pages of history and tracing the periods when education was rendered a matter of national regard, there are none perhaps that give us greater delight than when Alfred applied his time and his talents to civilize and cultivate the habits of his people. It is well known that he divided his kingdom into parishes, and modelled the first code of laws that regulated the various classes of society; and as literature was one of his earliest and most favorite studies, he well knew its value, and most anxiously desired that his subjects should enjoy the same privilege with himself. There is every reason to believe that parochial education, although of course to a limited extent, was established in his reign. Unhappily, however, for his subjects, the succeeding monarchs did not follow up his noble example; foreign invasion and intestine warfare left no leisure for cultivating the arts of peace, and the great anxiety of the clergy, who were the only scholars

of the day, to keep the minds of their people in a state of degrading ignorance, tended much to impede the progress of learning; and we find but few traces of public schools until the sixteenth century.

It was at this period that the present Wisbech Grammar School was, in all probability, erected; although we find the name of Jacob Cresner recorded in Cole's MS. as a schoolmaster in 1446, and another in 1506, yet we must have recourse to the charter of Edward VI. granted in 1549, as the earliest authentic record on which we can rely with any degree of safety.*

This charter, after granting to the inhabitants certain estates, and giving directions as to their management and appropriation of the rents, ordains and directs that 'there should be in the town of Wisbech a school or place of learning for the instruction of boys and young men in grammatical knowledge and polite learning; and also a schoolmaster learned in the Latin and Greek languages, and imbued with virtuous morals, to the end that he, the boys and young men whomsoever thither resorting and coming together in grammatical knowledge, and the Greek and Latin languages, should freely without any exaction, institute, teach, and imbue;' and it also directs 'that the schoolmaster should receive from the inhabitants a salary and stipend of twelve pounds per annum.'

The old records state that William Bellman gave a plot of ground for the school house, in the year 1549—the same year in which the charter of Edward VI. was

* Winchester School was established in 1382, and Eton in 1446.

granted—and there is every reason to believe that the present building was erected at the same time.

The origin of the term *grammar-school*, and the regulations that were to be observed in public education, are to be found in the Ecclesiastical Canon Laws, passed in 1608.

The 79th canon directed ‘that all schoolmasters should teach in English or Latin, as the children were able to bear, *the larger and shorter catechisms* theretofore by public authority set forth: and as often as any sermon should be upon holy and festival days, within the parish where they taught, they should bring their scholars to the church where such sermon should be made, and there see them quietly and soberly behave themselves; and should examine them at times convenient after their return what they had borne away of such sermon.’ It also provides that they should teach the *grammar* set forth by King Henry VIII., and continued in the times of King Edward VI., and Queen Elizabeth, of noble memory, and none other.

The *larger* catechism here alluded to is that contained in the book of Common Prayer, and the *shorter* catechism is that ordained by the letters patent of Edward VI., to be taught in all schools: it was examined, revised, and corrected in the convocation of 1562, and published in 1570, to be a guide to the young clergy in the study of divinity, as containing the substance of our reformed religion.*

The *grammar* referred to is that compiled and set forth by William Lilly, and others, especially appointed

* See Gibs, 374.

by the king; in the preface to which book it is declared 'that as for the diversity of grammars, it is well and profitably taken away by the King's Majesty's wisdom, who, foreseeing the inconvenience and favorably providing the remedy, caused one kind of grammar, by sundry learned men, to be diligently drawn and so to be set out only,—everywhere to be taught for the use of learners, and for avoiding the hurt in changing of schoolmasters.'

The 77th canon gives particular directions 'that no man shall teach either in public schools or private houses, but should be allowed by the bishop of the diocese or ordinary of the place, under his hand and seal; being found meet as well for his learning and dexterity in teaching as for sober and honest conversation, and also for right understanding of God's true religion.' These canons, which were confirmed in the reign of James I. and were incidentally acknowledged by parliament as the law of the land in the Statute of 4th James, c. 7, formed the basis on which all public schools were conducted; and great care, we perceive, was taken to guard the infant mind against imbibing the errors of popery.

Various laws were afterwards enacted enabling persons to give lands for the benefit of the public schools, which they were previously disabled from doing by what is commonly called the Mortmain Act, and several individuals in Wisbech and its immediate neighbourhood, availed themselves of the power granted by the legislature: we find that Thomas Parke, Esq., whose monument we have recorded, gave by his will, twenty acres of land in the parish of Elm, for the use of the

schoolmaster; and in 1657, John Crane, Esq., by his will, also appropriated a small estate 'to amend the schoolmaster's wages.'

The next document that we met with in our chronological arrangement, and by far the most important, is the charter of Charles II., which it will be recollected was granted in the year 1680. It refers to the grant made by Edward VI., and not only defines the duties and qualifications of the schoolmaster, but directs the mode of his election, and recognizes the visitatorial powers of the bishop, as established by the canons which we have referred to. The charter ordains that 'the capital burgesses, with the consent and approbation of any other ten inhabitants of the town, having voices in the election of the capital burgesses for the time being, shall have the nomination, appointment, and putting in of the schoolmaster in the school, as often as it shall happen to become vacant, from time to time for ever; and that the bishop of Ely shall have the visitation, reformation, and correction, as well of the schoolmaster as of the school.' We have extracted this clause of the charter at length, since it prescribes the mode in which the master still continues to be elected.

Our ancestors, in our opinion, shewed great wisdom in placing in the hands of the bishops a control over the discipline of schools, but how little could they be aware that the duties thus given to the diocesans would be so totally disregarded; it is true that they visit their dioceses at stated periods, but such visitations 'are few and far between,' and then three or four of the principal towns only are honored with their presence, so that in point of practice, they are as little acquainted with the

discipline adopted in the grammar schools, as the Pope of Rome, or the High Priest of the Antipodes. Oh, when—we ask it with feelings of earnest devotion—when will these things meet with a reformation? when will our spiritual pastors, and the dignitaries of the church, arouse from their slumbers, and become real labourers in the vineyard of their Divine Master?

There have been many arguments in the courts of law to ascertain the precise extent of the functions of the master of a grammar school, but these we leave to the legal literati, or ‘learned in the law,’ who are partial to the abstruse and uninteresting details of such an enquiry, and content ourselves with the decision, which appears to have established the point, that they are confined to teaching the Greek and Latin languages; and until some general legislative measure shall be adopted to remedy the defect, the usefulness of these schools can never be very materially increased. It was a common practice during several years, for the scholars to frequent the public grammar school, and acquire the rudiments of the classical languages, which they were enabled to do gratuitously by the charter, and then seek instructions in English and the other routine of education at other schools, where they might be purchased at a more reasonable rate; but as this custom was attended with considerable inconvenience and disadvantage to the public, the corporation have lately endeavoured to remedy the evil, and resolved to appropriate the sum of forty-eight pounds per annum out of their general funds, as a remuneration to the master for teaching English to twenty boys, to be by them nominated from time to time as vacancies might occur.

We have seen that the charter provides an annual stipend for the master of the grammar school, amounting to twelve pounds; the master also receives the rents of four acres of land in Crab Marsh, in Wisbech, and twenty-six acres of land in Elm, the annual rental of which at present amounts to about £80. and there is a residence provided for him attached to the school, the parochial rates of which are paid by the corporation; the sum of £8. 8s. is also allowed for lodgings provided for the Judge at the assizes, and the small salary of £2. per annum for keeping the key of the public library at the church.

There are two scholarships attached to the school, and as they are of very considerable value to the inhabitants of the town, we shall enter rather minutely into their history.

In 1638, Wm. Holmes, who was born in Wisbech, proposed 'for the love and affection which he did bear to his native town,' to deliver into the hands of the capital burgesses, a certain sum of money to be applied to charitable uses declared by a deed referred to in his will. This deed, which is dated 12th June, 1638, contains a stipulation on the part of the capital burgesses that they and their successors, or the greater number of them, together with the head schoolmaster of the free school of Wisbech for the time being, should for ever elect and choose out of the free school of Wisbech aforesaid, two of the most able and learned scholars of the said school, born in the said parish of Wisbech, who had been brought up scholars by the space of three years, and whose friends and parents' estates were not wholly sufficient to maintain them as scholars in the

University of Cambridge; and that they should pay and allow to the said two scholars eight pounds, yearly, for the space of seven years, for their education during such time in Saint Mary Magdalen College; and if it should happen that such scholars should die, or should wilfully depart from the said college by the space of three months without allowance from the said burgesses or their successors, the said schoolmaster, or the greater number of them, or should be elected fellow of the same, or any other college in the University of Cambridge or Oxford, or for any misdemeanor or unworthiness by them to be committed, should be adjudged unfitting to live in the college, or should be admitted to any preferment out of any of the said universities, then that other scholars should be elected in their stead, and the accumulation of the funds should in the mean time be preserved for the benefit of their successors.

The capital burgesses appropriated the money thus confided to their care, in the purchase of an estate, consisting of forty acres of land, at Holbeach, in the adjoining county of Lincoln, and after the death of Wm. Holmes, which occurred in 1657, the first two scholars were elected and sent to Magdalen College. The rent of the estate gradually increased, and was regularly applied for the purposes defined by the deed until the year 1752, but for several years subsequent to this period, there were, as it was represented, no scholars qualified to enjoy the privilege, and the corporation applied the funds to public purposes for the benefit of the town.

In the year 1765, proceedings were instituted by his Majesty's Attorney General, at the instigation of the Master and Fellows of Magdalen College, against the

capital burgesses, to compel them to fulfil the trusts of the will and deed: an account was taken of the rents that had been received, and the amount was ordered to be paid into the Court of Chancery, to be invested in the three per cent. Bank Annuities: it was also ordered by the court, that all future unappropriated funds should be invested in a similar manner, and the interest of such investments, and the rent of the estate, be regularly applied in conformity with the directions contained in the deed.

The present rent of the estate is sixty pounds per annum, which, together with the interest of £2608. 15s. 5d.—the amount invested in the public government securities—produces an annual fund of about one hundred and forty pounds, to be divided between the two scholars. The income thus afforded to the young student is so valuable that parties have been known to pauperize themselves, as far as their declarations could extend, for the purpose of securing the privilege for their family; such conduct, however, has always met with public reprobation, and the days have now passed away when such an abuse could be tolerated by the guardians of this public and most important trust.

In the year 1820, a scholar* was sent from the grammar school, a son of a very respectable tradesman of the town, who, by his academic career, has not only reflected considerable credit on himself, but on the public institution in which he received the rudiments of his education. On proceeding to Magdalen College he devoted his whole time to the studies that were allotted

* Rev. Thomas Grainger Hall, M. A.

to him, and by his talent and unremitted industry, acquired a share of the greatest honors that the university had the power to confer, being the fifth wrangler of his year, and was afterwards elected a fellow of his college. He is now the Professor of Mathematics at the King's College, in London, and his eminent station will always form a beacon light to cheer the young students of the present day through the toils and troubles of their scholastic life. Thomas Herring, D.D., Archbishop of Canterbury, the present Bishop of Kildare, and Thomas Clarkson, Esq., (the strenuous advocate for the abolition of slavery,) received their education at this school.

Amongst the number of persons who have held the situation of head master, there is one, whose name it gives us sincere pleasure in recording, and we do so the more readily since there is no probability of this page ever reaching his observation—we, of course, refer to the Rev. J. R. Major, M.A., late of Trinity College, Cambridge, who was elected in the year 1826, in consequence of his high testimonials for talent, and the excellence of his private character. He is a profound Greek scholar, and his knowledge of that language is fully exhibited in the editions of the *Orestes* and *Hecuba*, which he published with English notes to facilitate the progress of his scholars.

His talents, however, were of too high an order to be immured in a provincial town, and the same testimonials that acquired for him the mastership of the grammar school, soon afterwards secured him his present honorable and lucrative appointment of head master of the school attached to the metropolitan King's College.

The next subject that claims our attention is the

public charity schools. At the commencement of our chapter we have observed that it was not until the sixteenth century that grammar schools were generally instituted throughout the country ; these, however, were appropriated exclusively for the education of the better classes of society, and previously to the time of the reformation there were no public places of resort where the poor could enjoy the benefits of education, excepting occasionally at the convents : after the reformation bibles were fixed on stands* in all the churches, where they resorted for the purpose of learning to read, the prayers of the church were offered up in the vulgar tongue, bibles and books of homilies were distributed, and other measures to instruct the ignorant were adopted by the clergy, who acted in the character of catechists to their parishioners ; but the inadequate support left for the clergy, on the dissolution of the monasteries, much impeded the spirit of the reformers, and it was not until the year 1663, that a system of general education for the poor was attempted. In this year a person by the name of Nedham proposed a plan, that the parish clerks throughout the country should have an allowance made to them from the national revenues, for public teaching, under the superintendence of the minister, and from the address published by him at the time, it appears that the poor were clearly the objects of his compassionate regard, since it states ‘ that it must needs pity any christian heart to see the little

* Eagles, of brass, on pedestals, are still preserved in many of the churches, on which the bible were placed : there is one in the church of Walpole St. Peter.

dirty infantry which swarm up and down the alleys and lanes, with curses and ribaldry in their mouths, and other rude behaviour, as if they were intended to put off their humanity, and degenerate into brutes.'

In such a state, however, they were suffered to remain for several years afterwards, and the first public charity school was that established in Westminster, in the year 1698.

Brighter days now began to dawn upon this hitherto unenlightened land, and the eighteenth century opened with the most glorious prospects for the uneducated poor. The society for promoting Christian Knowledge commenced its course of usefulness in the same year as the Westminster Charity School, and in 1714, it had succeeded in establishing 1,073 schools, where 19,653 children obtained, gratuitously, religious instruction.

The funds of this noble institution were soon found insufficient for the universal establishment of public charity schools, and some little time after the reformation, the clergy gradually began to treat the revenues raised for the support of religion, and themselves, as private property, destined for their own exclusive use, rather than as a public trust; and thus this good work did not meet with the extensive encouragement that it deserved: but fortunately for the cause of philanthropy, pious individuals were not wanting to contribute their aid, and amongst the benefactors to schools established in Wisbech, we find that the name of Elizabeth Wright stands preeminent above the rest. By her will, which bears date in 1729, she gave certain estates in Wisbech, Leverington, Sutton, Parson Drove, Tyd Saint Mary, and elsewhere, to certain trustees

for charitable purposes particularly specified, and declared that in the event of their deaths, 'other good churchmen' should be appointed in their places. The rents of the messuage and premises, in the will described to be in the occupation of William Thompson, (but now of Mr. Cripps, and situated between the bridge and the old market place,) after deducting a small portion for an annuitant since deceased, she directed should be applied by the trustees for the use and benefit of the Wisbech Charity School for boys, and £12. per annum out of the rents of the remaining part of the estates, for the use and benefit of the Wisbech Charity School for girls; and the trustees were empowered to apply the surplus rents, which were not specifically appropriated by her will, to such charitable uses, and in such manner as they, in their discretion, should think fit. These valuable funds formed the principal support of the schools for many years, but their usefulness was not considerably extended from a lukewarm indifference that existed as to the gratuitous education of the poor.

The public, however, were aroused from their slumbers, and their attention called again to the subject by the patriotic exertions of the celebrated Bell and Lancaster, and more particularly by the former, whose system as established at Madras in 1789, and published in 1797, had been attended with the most complete success.

Schools were soon afterwards established in various parts of the kingdom, but it was not until the year 1811 that this town followed the example so nobly held out to it by others. In that year subscriptions were raised, and the present capacious and ornamental buildings

were constructed; that dedicated to the use of the boys was built between the Churchyard and the Canal, and the other at the north end of Ship Lane, now Lower Hill Street, not far from the river. The funds for the support of the boys' school at present consist of the rent of Mr. Cripps's house, £60.—the interest of several sums of money given by various individuals, £33. 10s.—£20., part of the residuary trust money under Elizabeth Wright's will, applied with the sanction of the Court of Chancery,—and also subscriptions and annual donations amounting to £36. 4s., making together £149. 14s. per annum.

We have seen that the will of Elizabeth Wright provided a much smaller allowance for the school for girls, but the deficiency was supplied in the year 1814. Abraham Jobson, D. D., the late vicar, whose name again and again stands forth in the character of a public benefactor, gave the sum of £500.; and John Edes, Esq., who had formerly been educated in the charity schools, and raised himself to opulence by his industrious habits, presented a similar donation of £500., and both these sums were invested in the purchase of an estate in the adjoining parish of Leverington, and the rents, amounting at present to £50. per annum, are regularly appropriated, together with the interest of other donations and the annual subscriptions, and an allowance out of Wright's residuary trust fund, towards the support of the Girls' school.

These historical details, and particularly the language of the will of Elizabeth Wright, who may be considered as the founder, will, we apprehend, be a sufficient reply to the enquiry sometimes made, why these public

schools are not liberally opened for the admission of dissenters: if they were supported by a grant out of the revenues of the nation under the direction of parliament, there might be some ground for all classes of the community partaking of the privilege; but when we discover that these schools have been indebted from their first establishment to the present time to members of the church for their support, no reasonable complaint can be made against the trustees and subscribers for giving preference to the admission of children of their own persuasion, and requiring their regular attendance on the services of the church.

The system at first adopted was that arranged by Dr. Lancaster, but it was from some cause or other soon afterwards abandoned, and there is at present but little order or regularity in the method of tuition; the principal defect in the school for boys is the want of regular attendance being strictly enforced; leave of absence is so generally granted, either for purposes of husbandry in the field or for some other temporary and irregular employment in the town, that it is altogether impossible to secure a regular classification of the scholars; a committee should be appointed by the subscribers, to visit the school in rotation, not only to record their names in books provided for the purpose, but to enter minutely into all the machinery of their daily management and proceedings.

It must be admitted that owing to the ignorance and prejudice of the parents of the children, there is very considerable difficulty in forming a general scheme of management, and that difficulty is considerably increased when the education of females is concerned,

since it is not confined to reading and writing, but also to needlework, and other matters of domestic polity: the general introduction of machinery has almost entirely superseded the good old practice of knitting, and the distaff, which always formed a constant and useful means of employment. At present the girls occupy part of their time in making their own apparel, but they might also be instructed in working articles of clothing for the poor, to be distributed under the direction of the Dorcas Charity,—to the plaiting of straw bonnets,—the washing of linen,—or any other household acquirement that might prove serviceable to them in future life,—a point which is never lost sight of by the Moravians in all their excellent establishments.

In addition to these there is a sunday school* in connection with the church, established by Dr. Jobson, who resigned into the hands of the capital burgesses the sum of £500. and directed that the interest should be applied in providing books and public teachers: this privilege has, however, been much neglected, and it is really lamentable to see how little this school is attended to; but whilst the members of the church establishment and its ministers exhibit such an unhappy indifference to this important subject, the dissenters, with the zeal and activity that characterize all their

* Sunday Schools were first brought into notice by Robert Raikes, a printer, of Gloucester, in the year 1781: that excellent divine, Bishop Porteus, warmly espoused the cause: but it was chiefly indebted to Mrs. Trimmer, who not only devoted her valuable time to superintend schools, but wrote those valuable Treatises, which are found so useful in religious instructions.

proceedings, are diligently engaged in this field of usefulness, and tribes of little children that formerly spent those days, which should be devoted to religious exercises and quiet recreation, in idleness or riot, are now seen flocking in well-arranged order, from the schools to their various places of worship.

The charitable institutions that we have recorded are exceedingly useful, but they are too limited in their operations, and we should exceedingly rejoice to see some general system of national education adopted. Prussia* and other states on the continent have long since experienced its advantages, but in England the science of education, like that of all other branches of political economy as applicable to the existing state of society, appears in its infancy, and but little understood. The present Lord Chancellor (Lord Brougham,) and many other eminent persons have devoted much time and consideration to the subject, but after all their laborious researches, they have not been able to devise a plan to accomplish their wishes, being apprehensive that the dedication of public money to purposes of national education, would chill the present active operations of private charity.

We have observed that the plan of Nedham, in 1633, was to afford all parish clerks an allowance for teaching the children of the poor, but these functionaries are generally so incapable of executing their own duties of simple repetition with any degree of credit, and are so deficient in a knowledge of even the rudiments of

* See a Report on the State of Public Instruction in Prussia, by M. V. Cousin, Peer of France, translated by Mrs. Sarah Austin.

learning, that their services would not be very satisfactory; and the village schoolmasters are generally elected to this office because they are incapable of filling any other active station in life; and as they teach more by the ferula than the force of talent or rational persuasion, we fear but little profit could ever be derived from their manual exertions.

We hope that in the course of a few years some public institution will be established for the instruction of schoolmasters, and that when well versed in the hitherto mysterious art of teaching, they may be sent into the provinces, and their services generally called into action, their salaries being partly provided for out of the national funds: but whatever system of tuition they may be recommended to adopt, we are firmly convinced that their teaching will be in vain, unless the children are educated in the principles of christianity, since it is as impossible for religious habits to spring up spontaneously in the infant mind, and grow with its growth, as it is for us to see the most beautiful flowers flourish in a barren soil without their being planted, and the aid of a cultivating hand to rear and direct their tender shoots, and protect them from the storm. We are most firmly convinced that all systems of education must be radically defective where the holy bible, without note and without comment, is not the principal class-book in all schools for the education of the poor.

CHAPTER IX.

Public Charities.

THERE are, perhaps, few towns in the kingdom where the public charities are so extensive, or where they are more faithfully or beneficially administered. The capital burgesses have the control and distribution of the principal funds, and as they annually publish an account of the manner in which their trust has been performed, by a regular statement of their receipts and payments, an effectual check is kept on their proceedings, and all possibility of abuse is prevented. These charities are of such great importance to the public, that we shall give a full detail of their origin and history, and as in their distribution the intention of their founders should be the only guide, we shall adopt as much of the language of the original wills and documents as the limits of our work will possibly admit; it may, probably, appear to some rather a tedious enquiry, but it must be recollected that we are not only recording the good deeds of our ancestry, but at the

same time disseminating and preserving a transcript of the muniments that defend and perpetuate the rights of the poor.

The principal names on the list of public benefactors are those of Crane, Holmes, Baxter, Parke, and Mrs. Elizabeth Wright.

John Crane, by his will which is dated 26th June, 1651, gave to the town of Wisbech, wherein he was born, his house or inn there, called the Black Bull, with the oil mills and other buildings attached to it, the rent of which he estimated at forty pounds per annum, and directed that one moiety should, as we have seen, be applied 'to amend the schoolmaster's wages of the free school,' and the other moiety 'be laid out at the best time of the year to buy corn and firing, to be given to the poor of the same town about Christmas, or New Year's Day.' He also requested that his executors should buy 'sixty pounds a year of good land or tenements, so as the tenants might have a good penny worth to pay willingly their rent.' He enjoins his executors to take good heed in the letting of it to good and honest mens' hands, and able men as feoffees in trust; and pays a compliment to our townsmen which, although it may excite our smiles, yet it can be fully appreciated by such of us as value the fruits of industry, and when gathered know how to treasure them up,—he declares 'I think the Wisbech men very safe:' having thus consigned the rents to their faithful guardianship, he gives instructions that 'they shall be applied during every five years successively, to the University of Cambridge, and the towns of Wisbech, Cambridge, Ipswich, and King's Lynn. The rents apportioned for Wisbech

estimated by Crane at sixty pounds per annum, 'are to be lent freely to three young men, to help to set them up, they putting in good security to pay it back to the ten men, or others in trust, at the twenty years end, and then they are to be lent to other three men in like order;' and he declared by his will that when the rents should form a fund more than was required for such loans at the stipulated times, that 'the surplus should be given and bestowed upon honest poor men that be in prison for debt, or old women, or the relief of poor men in want, or to relieve them out of prison for debt,'—with this solemn appeal,—desiring them in trust in this business, 'as they will answer it before God, that they relieve the most honest, godliest, and religious persons, men and women, in the said several towns, that have lived well and had a good report, being fallen into decay by some extraordinary occasion; and not to give it to dissembling, hypocritical persons:' and he also gave forty shillings to every town where this money was bestowed, 'to have a sermon that year to invite other men to do the like.'

This sermon has been regularly preached at the periods stated in the will, since the death of Crane, which occurred in 1654, but either from a want of devotional eloquence on the part of the preachers, or of a free liberality on the part of the congregations, ' (Wisbech men being very safe,) ' the like has never hitherto been done again.

The executors purchased an estate at Fleet, in Lincolnshire, consisting of 182 acres of land, in conformity with the will, and the rents are received every fifth year by the corporation.

The house and premises in Wisbech, designated as the Black Bull Estate, were conveyed to the corporation, under the direction of the Court of Chancery, in the year 1674, were sold by them in the year 1802, and the money applied in redemption of the land tax charged on their general estates; but they annually appropriate the sum of £59. 6s.—the amount of taxes redeemed—out of their revenues to the object of this charity.

The money directed to be advanced to set young men up in business is regularly applied to the purposes intended, and many a tradesman established in this town has looked back on the gratuitous loan of this fund of twenty pounds for twenty years, as having first been the means of launching him into a stage of useful industry. The coals and corn are distributed on St. Thomas's day amongst a number of poor persons, whose names are regularly called over, arranged, and agreed upon by 'the capital burgesses in common hall assembled;' but there is great difficulty in regulating the distribution of the surplus rental funds in compliance with the wishes of the testator.

It appears that one of the principal objects contemplated by Crane, was to extricate poor persons imprisoned for debt: at the time when he made his will, (1651,) the debtor was consigned to prison without the possibility of being released excepting on payment of the debt, and there he frequently remained through many a long and tedious year, in a miserable state of existence, without money and without friends, having perhaps at first 'fallen into decay by some extraordinary occasion,' and his industry, which might ultimately

have discharged the claims of his creditors, and have been a support to his family, had he been allowed its exercise, was suffered gradually to wear away, and become extinct within the walls of a dungeon. Such was the object that this good man was so anxious to set free; but happily for the cause of humanity, the legislature afterwards accomplished his noble design, by a series of acts of parliament, which have enabled the insolvent man, on resigning his property to his creditors, and giving a faithful statement of his affairs, to be at once discharged from his imprisonment.

This humane provision has in a great measure superseded the object of this charity, and the money is divided by the corporation into five annual portions of about seventy pounds each, and distributed generally during the month of February, amongst such persons as have fallen into decay, and other classes of the poor; but the applicants became so numerous, and the money was divided into so many fractional parts, many of the objects receiving only a single shilling, that it had a tendency to create a spirit of vagrancy, without conferring any substantial relief, and it has lately been prudently resolved to apply the money of those that have died or left the town, to others remaining on the list, and by that means diminishing the number, but increasing the utility of the sums distributed; but it is, we fear, still frequently, but unintentionally, bestowed upon 'dissembling and hypocritical persons,' as it is extremely difficult, however closely we may study the human character, to distinguish between the undeserving and the truly necessitous.

William Holmes, by his will, dated 2nd April, 1656,

in addition to the valuable provision made for the two scholars at the University of Cambridge, gave unto the town of Wisbech, 'to remain in stock there for ever, the sum of three hundred pounds, to be by the capital burgesses, or the major part of them for the time being, forthwith lent out to poor tradesmen there, for the term of three years:' and he directed that the sum of one hundred pounds, part thereof should be lent during each of such three years, in sums of ten pounds, and so to be continued in regular rotation; each tradesman 'procuring and putting in very good and sufficient security for the repayment of the same' at the expiration of the term. No interest is made payable on these useful loans, they are advertised every year, and invariably advanced to the most industrious and deserving of the parties that apply for them.

The name of John Baxter is the next on the list. By his will, dated 4th November, 1793, he gave unto his wife the use of all his real and personal property during her life, and after her decease, he directed that the same should be divided amongst her children, and empowered his executor, after his wife's decease, to sell all his property, if she died without issue, to the best advantage, and deposit the money arising from the same, in the English Funds; and after the death of his executor, who was allowed to enjoy the interest during his life, the testator leaves the following instructions as to its disposition:—'I give and bequeath, in trust to the capital burgesses of Wisbech Saint Peter's, all the interest arising from such property lodged in the English Funds, for the uses hereinafter mentioned, that is to say, to allow annually ten pounds each to such

poor old man or woman, as far as my property will allow, totally incapacitated from labour, as shall be by them thought fit and proper objects, and with this injunction—that they shall constantly attend divine worship every sunday, and should they not punctually and strictly attend to this desire, to discontinue the charity to such person or persons so neglecting or refusing to comply with the same.’

Baxter died in the year 1798, having survived his wife, and without leaving any children; and after the death of his executor, in the year 1801, the trust devolved on the corporation. The produce of the property was invested in the purchase of £1386. Capital Stock, and the interest provides an annuity of ten pounds each to eight poor persons, who receive it quarterly from the Town Bailiff.

Amongst the many charitable funds this is found to be by far the most valuable, and confers the most lasting and substantial benefit, and many an infirm and afflicted person who has seen better days, is protected by this fund from the miseries of absolute want, and, with the aid of parochial and private contributions, not only receives all things necessary for subsistence, but is made comparatively happy and comfortable.

It may be observed that the will contains a strict injunction that the annuitants ‘shall constantly attend divine worship every sunday;’ now it does not require the aid of any legal acumen to discover that this most unequivocally points to their regular attendance on the services of the church; such was clearly the intention of the testator, and we trust that this intention will always be strictly fulfilled, and not frustrated by any

new and irregular interpretation. The parties who have the control over the fund, stand in the character of responsible trustees, bound by every religious obligation faithfully to carry into effect the wishes of the founder of the charity, as they stand so clearly developed in the language of the will, and nothing but the power of the legislature can absolve them from appointing persons who have regularly attended such divine worship, or from taking care that, when appointed, they uniformly comply with the conditions attached to the charity.

Thomas Parke, Esq., in the year 1628, gave by his will, an estate in Ship Lane, (now called the Bell Inn, and the adjoining house and premises, near to the river,) 'unto the Corporation of the town of Wisbech, to the use of the poor of the said parish for ever.' The rents, at present amounting to eighty-one pounds, are distributed annually, in clothing amongst the poor.

We have already alluded to the munificent bequest of Mrs. Elizabeth Wright in favor of the Charity Schools, and have recorded the manner in which she vested her general estates in trustees for charitable purposes, to be distributed at their discretion, but she gave instructions by her will, that the trustees should 'dispose of the rents and profits of her estate at Sutton, amongst honest, necessitous women, that have lived in good credit and reputation, and attend at church; 'and that the trustees should pay one guinea yearly to the lecturer of Wisbech, for preaching a sermon on St. Paul's day, and 'another one guinea' yearly for preaching a sermon on St. Barnabas,' out of the rents of her other property.

The estate at Sutton consists of forty acres of land, and the rents, which are now about one hundred and fifty pounds per annum, are distributed amongst honest necessitous women, as required by the will, and the surplus rents, generally forming an annual fund of a similar amount, are distributed by the trustees in money and clothing to the poor.

On the death of the majority of the trustees, 'other good churchmen' are to be appointed in their places; the present surviving trustees are Robert Hardwicke, Esq., M. D.—a highly respectable individual, who was annually elected one of the capital burgesses for upwards of fifty years in succession, and the greater part of whose life has been devoted to the services of the public, Jeremiah Jackson, M. A., and James Usill, Gentleman.

In 1656, the Right Hon. John Thurloe, Chief Secretary of State, gave £150. to the corporation, upon trust, to apply the interest yearly to the putting out of three apprentices.

In addition to these charitable funds there are the donations of Scottrel, Middlecoate, Loake, Ethelred Parkes, Girling, Royse, and Lord Say and Seal, which are recorded in the church, and have been previously enumerated, the King's dole, amounting to the sum of £3. 15s., which is directed by the charter 'to be distributed and disposed of among the poor inhabitants of the town annually for ever,' the funds of the shambles estate charity distributed in clothing, and also the almshouses of Stermyn and Hawkins, and Mrs. Mayer's asylum, which will claim our attention in a subsequent part of this chapter.

Such are the valuable funds which our ancestors have consigned to our care for the use of the poor: it was always a subject of astonishment and enquiry with us, when we first opened the page of history in our earlier years, why they so far surpassed the present generation in the number and extent of their charitable donations, and in the erection of their splendid cathedrals, and places of public worship: it must, we imagine, be attributed to the enthusiasm of the times in which they lived, as our ancestors were deeply impressed with the persuasion that the dedication of their lands and possessions, by will, to charitable and religious uses, would go far towards the expiation of sin, and the purchase of eternal happiness hereafter. This opinion was also entertained by the followers of Mahomet, since we find in the Alcoran—‘Prayer carries us halfway to God; fasting brings us to the door of his palace; and alms introduces us into his presence-chamber.’ To such an extent was this feeling carried three or four centuries since, that persons frequently left their families unprovided for, and, at the instigation of the clergy, devoted the whole of their property to the church, or some eleemosynary purpose.

This custom was soon found to be so very detrimental to the general interests of the state, that several public laws, and particularly the Statutes of Mortmain,* were passed to check such a general dedication of

* Mortmain is derived from *mortua manus*, the property ‘by such a disposition falling into dead hands and so dedicated to God or pious uses, and never reverting back to the donor or any other temporal use.’ See Cowell, and also Skene de signif: verb:

private property by will under the apprehension of approaching death; and it is declared by an Act of Parliament,* which is still in force, 'that no lands or tenements, or money to be laid out thereon, shall be given for, or charged with, any charitable uses, unless by deed executed in the presence of two witnesses, at least twelve calendar months before the death of the donor, and duly enrolled in the High Court of Chancery.'

It must not, however, be supposed that charitable donations were confined to the middle ages of the church, as there, perhaps, never was a period since the first establishment of christianity, when public charities were so generally instituted, and so universally watched over with a fostering care, or where the motives of the parties were so pure, and praiseworthy as the present.

We know that there are some excellent persons, who look with a feeling of compassion on the present generation, and deem it altogether as wicked as the world before the flood; but we are convinced that it exhibits a higher character for piety, sound feelings of devotion, and real charity, than has existed for many centuries past: let those who entertain such melancholy reflections on the years that are passing by, fix their attention on the numerous societies that have lately sprung up in all parts of our highly-favored land, for the propagation of the gospel, the abolition of slavery abroad, and for the education, and ameliorating the condition of the poor at home: let them but contemplate the increasing labours of thousands and ten thousands of individuals 'strong in union,' devoting their time and their money

* 9th Geo. 2, c. 36.

to visit and clothe the sick, the orphan, and the widow, and they will not only cease from being cast down, but rejoice rather that they are destined to live in such an age, and in such a country. It must be recollected that whilst political unions unfurl their banners in the air, whilst the infidel is proclaiming aloud his cold and miserable doctrines in the streets, and constantly obtruding himself on public notice, Charity pure and hallowed,—Charity, clad in her neat attire, and with a modesty that gives her such an endearing aspect, invariably courts the shade, takes her quiet round in the more unfrequented paths of life, and her good deeds are known only to her God.

In addition to the exertions of separate individuals, societies are formed for the accomplishment of particular objects.

In 1816 a society was established for clothing the most necessitous poor, denominated the Little Dorcas Charity, which is supported by annual donations and subscriptions, amounting generally to about sixty pounds: each contributor receives a certain number of tickets, and distributes them amongst such poor persons as he may think proper to select, and they, on presenting such tickets at a time and place which is specified, become entitled to choose such articles of clothing, not exceeding a stipulated quantity, as their necessities may require.

It was thought that an improvement on this system might be adopted, and a spirit of industry diffused and encouraged amongst poor persons, if they were allowed to purchase the articles at half of their value, and a separate society was instituted in the following year,

called the Great Dorcas Charity, which is conducted upon similar principles as to the donations, subscriptions, tickets, and distribution of the articles, excepting that the poor pay one half of the actual cost price of the clothing, and there is little doubt but that they take greater care of, and set a higher value upon, possessions in some measure acquired by their own industry, than those gratuitously placed at their disposal. The subscriptions and donations of this society generally amount to thirty pounds, and there is also the interest of one thousand pounds paid over by the late Dr. Jobson to the corporation for that purpose.

These societies are both admirably conducted by committees of the subscribers, who never lose sight of the character and example of that pious individual, whose name adorns their institutions.

There are societies for the relief of the poor at a time when they were supposed by the ancients to be under the especial care of Lucina, and also the Humane and Female Friendly Societies: a public dispensary is all that is now wanted to complete a most beautiful range of charitable institutions, and we are rejoiced to find that there is every probability of this deficiency being supplied in the course of a few years.

The late William Watson, Esq., F.A.S. whose work we have frequently had occasion to refer to, and a man whose excellence of character and universal philanthropy commanded the respect of all classes of society, has made a provision for this desirable object; and as the terms in which it is conveyed are so truly characteristic of the benevolent individual, we shall adopt the language of the will as it is recorded at Doctor's Commons.

‘ And whereas in the course of my life I have had (undeserving as I feel of such marks of regard,) the satisfaction of receiving certain very friendly tokens of respect from those with whom I had the pleasure of acting in public life, one of which is a handsome sword, presented to me by the officers of the Wisbech Volunteer Regiment of Infantry, which I had the honor to command as Lieutenant Colonel Commandant, in the year 1808; and the other is a splendid golden cup, presented to me in the year 1819, both of which I give to my wife for her life, and after her decease, I give the same sword and cup to the Capital Burgesses of Wisbech in their corporate capacity, to be preserved amongst their valuables, as a mark of my respect to the inhabitants of the town where I received such courtesies:’ and he directs that his trustees shall, after his wife’s decease, raise out of his personal estate ‘ the sum of one thousand pounds, either towards forming a fund to establish a dispensary within the town of Wisbech Saint Peter, for the benefit of the poor inhabitants thereof, or in case such institution shall be already established before such sum of one thousand pounds shall become payable, then that the same shall be paid in aid of the funds then raised for such benevolent purpose.’

This may be considered as the foundation-stone of the institution, and we trust that no time will be lost in following up the noble design, and that measures will be immediately adopted to raise the superstructure, and provide the means for its permanent support.

We will now proceed to the almshouses. The first in point of antiquity are those on the north side of the church yard, which are erroneously supposed to have

been founded by King John: it appears on referring to the ancient records, that they were dedicated to the public by Thomas Blower, in 1477, and we find an order for 'all the buildings of the guild to be repaired which were defective, and principally a certain new building called the almshouses.' There is no further record relating to these buildings until 1512, when two persons were appointed 'to regulate the almshouses, and see that they were properly occupied.'

In the years 1610 Mrs. Stermyn gave and bequeathed by her will one hundred pounds towards the building and erecting of a market-house in some convenient place where the corn market was usually kept in Wisbech, near the great river there,' and declared it to be her will that such market-house should be built with chambers over the same, and that such chambers should be let by the capital burgesses, and the rents applied in keeping the said market-house, and certain almshouses afterwards referred to in her will, in a good state of repair; and she also gave and bequeathed 'one hundred pounds for and towards the building and erecting of four almshouses, in Wisbech aforesaid, in some convenient place there,' with instructions 'that four aged persons shall have their dwellings therein freely from time to time by the discretion of the ten capital burgesses of Wisbech, and their successors for ever;' and the trustees are empowered 'to displace and expel any of the said persons that shall be supposed to have no need thereof.'

In 1614 the corn exchange was erected in compliance with the terms of the will, near to the bell estate and the present public crane, but it was taken down in the year 1786.

In 1616 the sum of one hundred pounds was paid to the corporation, and they proceeded to build the four almshouses on a plot of ground near to the house of correction, on the south brink of the river, but in 1813 they had become so dilapidated that they were taken down, and the site and materials were sold by public auction for £340. The corporation afterwards erected six new almshouses (at an expense of £706.) opposite to the charity school for boys, at the east end of the churchyard, with the following inscription:—

‘ These six almshouses were erected by the Burgesses of the Town of Wisbech, A.D. 1813.’

Hawkins’ almshouses derive their name from Henry Hawkins, L.L.D., a native of the town, who died in London, in 1631, having made this provision by his will:—

‘ I give and bequeath three hundred pounds of sterling money towards the building of certain almshouses for poor people in the Town of Wisbech, in the Isle of Ely, in a place called the Brink, near unto the little river, which almshouses I will shall be for the use and habitation of the poor people which are best affected, who, dwelling rent free, by their labour and honest travail pass their lives with more contentment, and live in the true fear and service of God, and charitable love amongst their neighbours; but because my executors dwell all in parts remote from thence, my will is that they shall not be troubled with the building or causing the same to be built, but upon security to be given to my executors by some able inhabitants of the same town, that such and so many houses, as for that money may be, shall be built, continue, and from time to time

repaired, and employed to the use and purpose mentioned before; and my said executors shall deliver the said three hundred pounds into their hands, who shall give security as aforesaid; and such poor persons shall from time to time be placed in the same houses after they are built, as to the overseers of the poor, the churchwardens, and the greater part of the vestry of the said town of Wisbech shall seem good and fit.

In 1632 the corporation gave the required security to Hawkins' executors, the sum of three hundred pounds was paid over, and in the following year the six almshouses adjoining to the public street and opposite to the eastern entrance of the churchyard, were immediately built; the right of nominating their inhabitants is exercised by the corporation, although the terms of the will appear to have reference to other guardians.

These buildings are so much out of repair that it is in contemplation to take them down, and it is supposed that the site, if disposed of for building purposes, will realize a sufficient fund not only to replace these almshouses, but also to erect others in lieu of King John's almshouses on the north side of the churchyard, which might then be demolished, and the site dedicated to the street.

On the north side of a lane leading from Deadman's pond to the churchyard, and opposite to the vicarage gardens, are five neat and comfortable little almshouses,* with iron palisades in front, erected by Joseph Med-

* 'Behold yon Almshouse, neat, but void of State,
Where Age and Want sit smiling at the gate.'

Pope.

worth, who, it will be recollected, purchased the castle estate, and built the range of houses called the Crescent,—the inscription on them records their history;—
' 1813. Castle almshouses for five poor women only of good repute, and not less than fifty years of age, built and endowed by Joseph Medworth, grandson of Edward Medworth, who, in the year 1692, gave a house and land on the south brink (as by corporation records) to the poor of Wisbech for ever.'

Mr. Medworth appointed the inhabitants during his lifetime, and has conferred the duty of the appointment on certain trustees named in his will.

Mrs. Judith Mayer by her will, dated 29th May, 1811, gave and bequeathed unto Robert Walpole, Esq., and Hugh Jackson, Gentleman, the sum of five hundred pounds upon trust, with all convenient speed after her decease, to erect in some proper place in Wisbech, such a building as to them should seem meet to be used as an asylum, to be called after her name, for the reception of such poor persons as might happen to be afflicted with palsy, rheumatism, gout, blindness, or any other complaint, and this she gave 'as a lasting mark of her good wishes and regard for the town of Wisbech and its inhabitants:' and she gave and bequeathed unto the capital burgesses of Wisbech, and to the vicar and churchwardens thereof for the time being, and their respective successors, the sum of one thousand and two hundred pounds, to be invested by them upon government security, and the interest to be applied towards the support and repair of such building, and for the benefit of such poor persons whose bodily afflictions and meritorious conduct should render them fit objects

for the asylum ; and the further sum of four hundred pounds is given to the same parties to be invested in like manner, and one moiety of the interest is directed to be paid to the poor generally, and the other moiety to be applied in the purchase of coals, annually to be distributed amongst the poor dwelling in the almshouses of Wisbech, for ever.

This charitable gift of money to build the asylum was, however, void in consequence of the provisions of the Mortmain Act, which we have before referred to, and consequently the legacies for its endowment were also rendered inoperative ; the entire funds intended for this praiseworthy object legally devolved on Hugh Jackson, Esq., one of the trustees, and the residuary legatee named in the will, but immediately after the death of Mrs. Mayer he very honorably proceeded to carry her intentions into effect, and in 1815 expended the sum of £744. in the erection of five almshouses near to the canal, on the eastern side of Stermyn's and Hawkins', and they are called ' Mrs. Mayer's Asylum,' agreeably with her wish.

Mr. Jackson, by a deed* dated 9th February, 1818, conveyed the almshouses to trustees with instructions that they should be used as an asylum for the reception of such poor persons as were designated by the will of Mrs. Mayer, under the following regulations:—that the nomination of objects to be resident therein, their removal, and the general visitation of the charity, should

* The particulars of this deed and also the will are extracted from a Pamphlet published in 1822 by the Rev. Jeremiah Jackson, M. A. —' *sum cuique.*'

be in Mr. Hugh Jackson as visitor during his life, and after his decease then in his immediate descendants, severally in succession according to seniority of age, during such time as such descendants should be resident in the town of Wisbech Saint Peter, or in any way connected with that town as owners and occupiers of messuages, land, or other real property therein, and on failure of such descendants, then in the Reverend Jeremiah Jackson, the brother of the said Hugh Jackson, and Hugh Jackson, Esq. of Stamford, the father of the said Hugh Jackson, successively, and their descendants, with similar restrictions as to residence; and when this succession of families shall become extinct, or shall be transplanted into a more fertile territory,—an event, we are happy to think, by no means probable,—then the visitation is finally vested in the capital burgesses for the time being, the vicar, and churchwardens, being the same parties as are nominated trustees for the charity in the will of Mrs. Mayer.

Mr. Jackson by the same deed transferred the sum of £1120. five per cent. annuities to the same trustees, and directed that out of the dividends the sum of ten pounds should be annually paid to the objects of charity resident in each of the five almshouses, and that the surplus should form an accumulation fund for the repair of the asylum, and the payment of the expenses incidental to the trust; and he also invested the sum of four hundred pounds, after deducting the legacy duty, in the purchase of £492. 6s. 2d. four per cent. consolidated bank annuities, and transferred these securities to trustees nominated by the vicar, churchwardens, and capital burgesses at a meeting convened for the purpose on the

22nd October, 1821, and the trustees then came to a resolution that part of the dividends of this investment should be applied to the purchase of one chaldron of coals for the use and benefit of the inhabitants for the time being resident in each of the said five several tenements in the asylum, and that the remaining part of such dividends should be expended in coals to be annually distributed amongst the poor dwelling in the several other almshouses in the town of Wisbech.

Having brought this part of our subject to a conclusion, let us for a moment contemplate the various charities that have successively occupied our attention, and we shall discover in them all the dispensations of a wise and merciful Providence. The same Being who declared 'that the poor shall never cease out of the land,' followed up the sentence with this beautiful admonition,—'therefore I command thee, saying, thou shalt open thy hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and thy needy in the land,' and we trust, with humility, that this commandment is not altogether disregarded.

We have seen how bountifully the poor are provided for; Charity steps forward to alleviate the sufferings attendant on their birth,—their intellectual powers no sooner begin to be developed than schools are open for their reception,—Thurloe's gift affords the means of acquiring their apprenticeship,—the noble bequests of Holmes and Crane supply them with funds for 'setting up in business,'—if they prove unfortunate the latter again comes to their aid with Baxter's welcome donation of annuities,—should their lot be cast in a lower state of society and consequently deprive them of this higher class of charities, yet they are still abundantly

provided for; bread, fuel, and clothing* are freely distributed amongst them, and when old age comes on with all its train of sorrows, the gates of the asylum and almshouses are opened to them, where they may find shelter from the storm, and spend the evening of their lives in piety and peace.

There is an endless source of sterling happiness in the contemplation of this subject, but we dwell with increased interest on the closing scene; there is not, we are confident, a more agreeable and satisfactory occupation than to frequent the almshouses of the poor; many are deterred from them in consequence of the querulous garrulity attendant on old age, but it should be recollected that it requires the greatest exertion of the most cultivated mind to suffer in silence, and conceal poverty from those, who have the power, and whose presence betrays the wish, to alleviate its sorrows and privations. We have spent hours in these humble abodes, and have listened with unwearied attention to all the little narratives and chronicled events rehearsed by their inhabitants, who form a kind of connecting link between the present days and those that have long been numbered with the past: they tell us of the history and all the minute and interesting particulars of our families, or those of friends and associates, whose names we delight in listening to, having probably fulfilled a faithful servitude with some of their ancestry; they tell us of the

* 'What riches give us, let us now enquire,—

'Meat, fire, and clothes,—what more? Meat, clothes, and fire.'

Pope.

manners and customs of their early years—the good old times

‘ Ere England’s griefs began,
‘ When every rood of ground maintained its man;’—
When ‘Squire and Pastor from their pockets drew
The book, the tract,—but gave the shilling too.

but above all they tell us of the feelings and expectations of persons dwelling on the verge of the grave: we have never visited these little sanctuaries without feeling happier and better on our return,—they have given us a peace of mind and religious contentment which the banquets of the rich, with all their midnight revelry, had not to bestow; and often have we envied the calling of those whose duties bring them so frequently to these peaceful scenes of life that seem to lead the way to a happy eternity.

CHAPTER X.

The Dissenters.

CHRISTIANITY had scarcely become established, and the labour of the apostles had scarcely terminated, before various sects arose that continued afterwards separate from the primitive church; these sects were multiplied during several succeeding centuries until the catholic religion became predominant. At this period the clergy used every exertion to keep the people in a state of ignorance on every subject connected with religion, and a knowledge of the contents of the bible was confined almost exclusively to the priesthood; but when the Reformation burst forth with all its illuminating splendour on this darkened land,—when the art of printing became more generally understood,—and consequently when the scriptures became more universally promulgated, a spirit of enquiry rapidly arose, and the truth of particular doctrines was closely and freely examined and discussed.

‘ It is a striking fact’ observes the elegant and learned author of the *Life of Leo X.*,* ‘ that mankind, when they begin to cultivate their intellectual powers, have generally turned their first attention towards those abstruse and speculative studies which are the most difficult of comprehension,’ and this observation which was applied to the increasing enquiry into the metaphysical doctrines of Aristotle and Plato at the period to which we refer, may be applied with equal force to the rapidly spreading enquiry into the mysterious doctrines contained in the holy scriptures.

It is not surprising that during this their extensive and zealous investigation, persons should discover some particular points on which they imagined even the protestant reformers to be in error; and these points would be fastened so constantly on their attention, that they would gradually increase in importance, and at last the parties would deem what they considered a correct view of them so essentially necessary to salvation, that they would on that account separate from the church; and as they were generally persons of bold and enterprising spirits, disciples were soon found to flock around them, and they formed themselves into separate societies.

These objections, however, to particular doctrines were not, as we have seen, altogether the invention or discovery of modern times, as Milner† has justly observed in his *Church History*,—‘ they have been revived

* Roscoe's *Life of Leo X.*, vol. 3, (8vo. ed.) p. 73, c. 20.

† Vol. 2, p. 396, c. 4.

from age to age with new names and under new dresses, carrying only the appearance of something original.'

No sects of any importance have been established within the last half century, but the congregations of those that previously existed have very considerably increased. The causes of this increase are, we fear, too easily to be traced; but they do not necessarily fall within the scope of our present undertaking, and as it is a subject which excites within us the most painful feelings, we willingly desist from the enquiry.

The principal and more religious classes of the dissenters differ only from the Church of England on some one particular point of doctrine, but they all, as we shall perceive, unite in their objections to its discipline and mode of government. It is, however, exceedingly difficult to ascertain the precise tenets of each particular sect, as they have no catechism; articles of faith, or other well-authenticated records from which they can be collected, and we can only discover them from the writings and memoirs of the individuals who were the original founders.

The dissenters in the town consist principally of Methodists, Calvinists, Independents, Unitarians, Quakers, Baptists, and Particular Baptists.

The sect of *Methodists* was founded in this country in 1729, by Mr. John Wesley, who was the son of a clergyman, regularly educated for the church at the University of Oxford, and elected a fellow of Lincoln College about the year 1725.

A few fellow-students (Wesley being amongst the number,) first met together in the university to read the scriptures, and exercise themselves in private prayer:

they soon formed themselves into a society enforcing amongst its members the most strict and religious discipline,—received the sacrament of the Lord's supper every week,—observed all the fasts of the church,—visited the prisons,—rose at four o'clock in the morning,—refrained from all amusements; and from the exact method in which they disposed of every hour of the day, acquired the name of Methodists. They for some time received episcopal ordination, but, conceiving afterwards a design of forming separate communities, they travelled over different parts of the country, and preached either in private houses, or in the open air.

It was soon found difficult to obtain the aid of the regularly ordained clergy, Wesley was therefore compelled in 1742 to have recourse to lay preachers, and he selected those, who had the greatest talents for extemporary prayer and exhortation: his labours were seconded by Whitfield, who was also a regularly ordained clergyman, and they both became the leaders of the sect. It was, however, discovered that they differed very materially in their doctrines,—those of Whitfield being based on Calvinism, or particular redemption, and Wesley following the Arminians, who embraced the doctrine of general redemption for all that believed in Jesus Christ; and their disciples consequently divided themselves into two separate societies.

‘The distinguishing principles of Methodism are, salvation by faith in Jesus Christ, perceptible and in some cases instantaneous conversion, and an assurance of reconciliation to God, with which they say the new birth, or being born again, is inseparably attended.’*

* Dr. Evans's *Sketch of the Denominations of the Christian World*, 15th Ed. p. 203.

No persons are admitted as regular members of the society without an examination and enquiry made by the ministers and leaders as to their character, and none but these are allowed to receive the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

The society established in the town consists of about one hundred and fifty members, but their chapel in the Crescent, which was built by subscription in the year 1808, affords accommodation for about five hundred persons, and is frequented by many who are not members in the strict acceptation of the word, and by others who also attend the services of the church. They administer baptism, not by immersion, but in the usual mode, without, however, calling in the aid of sponsors. They use the church yard for purposes of burial of course without the attendance of their own ministry,—differ but little in their opinions from the members of the Church, and do not take any active part in the hostility now so strongly manifested against the Establishment or its connexion with the State.

The *Calvinists* have a place of worship near to the Cattle Market; their congregation is but small, generally not exceeding fifty persons. Their distinguishing theological tenet is that of predestination. The articles of the Church of England are, it is well known, based on the combined doctrines of Luther and Calvin, but those of the latter reformer are becoming more generally received.

The Calvinists entertain an opinion that very few will be saved, but do not forget to reconcile themselves to the persuasion that they shall be of the number of the blessed: this belief in their own future felicity might

be entertained (and we should imagine with much greater comfort to themselves,) without consigning, in imagination, so large a portion of mankind, including of course many of their dearest relatives and friends, to the expectation of eternal punishment.

The *Independents* adopt, with but little variation, the tenets and opinions entertained by the disciples of Novatian* in the third century of our christian era: they became established in England as a separate sect during the reign of Queen Elizabeth. The hierarchy and several of the public ordinances instituted by that princess gave great offence to some of her subjects, who were anxious to effect a more extensive reformation, and a purer form of worship: these persons, in the year 1581, placed themselves under the guidance of a very zealous and enthusiastic person by the name of Brown, who divided his followers into separate societies or congregations, and maintained that they were independent by divine right (*jure divino*), and exempt from episcopal or regal jurisdiction; but a person by the name of John Robinson was chiefly instrumental to their earliest establishment, and declared in the Apology which he published, and which formed the basis of their government, that each separate assembly was an entire and perfect Church,† independent as far as re-

* An account of this sect will be found in Mosheim's *Eccles. Hist.* Vol. 1, c. 5. p. 277.

† The following are the terms used in the original Apology:—
'Cœtum quemlibet particularem esse totam integram et perpetuam ecclesiam ex suis partibus constantem immediatè et independentem, (quoad alias ecclesias) sub ipso Christo.'

gards other churches, but under Christ alone, and they thenceforth assumed the appellation of Independents.

Their doctrines are similar to those of the Church of England, but they do not subscribe to the ordination of priests, and reject all creeds and confessions drawn up by the wisdom of man, regarding the bible and the bible only as the standard of their faith and practice: they acknowledge no allegiance to bishops or synods, but declare that 'one is their Master even Christ, and they are all brethren.' They administer baptism to those who make a credible profession of faith in Christ, not having previously received it, and also to their infant offspring, but dispense with the sponsor's vow. They allow those only, who are received into christian fellowship with their community to partake of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, and do not acknowledge any persons as regular members of their society until certain delegates appointed for that purpose are satisfied of their piety, and that their conduct adorns their christian profession. They have a chapel at the west entrance to the Crescent which is capable of accommodating between 650 and 700 persons; their congregation is generally composed of nearly 500 persons, and about one fourth of that number are regular members. The chapel, and also the adjoining dwelling house designed as a residence for the minister were built in the year 1818, at an expense of £2000., which was raised by voluntary subscriptions.

The *Unitarians* have a place of worship in Deadman's Lane, but the number of persons frequenting it seldom exceed fifty.

The origin of this sect may probably be traced to the

commencement of the fifth century, their doctrines being closely allied to those of the Pelagians,* who pretended to the height of purity, supported by human nature exclusive of the operations of divine grace, and conformed themselves to the dictates of what is commonly called natural religion; but their opinions were carried to a much more objectional extent about the middle of the sixteenth century, when they assumed the title of Socinians† (from Socinus, who was born in 1539,); they denied the divinity of our Saviour, maintained that he was a mere man, who had no existence before his appearance on earth, but that he was highly favored of God. They rejected the doctrines of satisfaction and imputed righteousness as well as original sin, and contended that the punishment of the wicked will not be eternal, but for a certain time in proportion to their demerits.

Such were the sentiments entertained by the Socinians, and they were adopted in their general character by Dr. Priestley, to whom the modern Unitarians refer as their guide and preceptor.

They rely more on their own moral‡ perfection than on the atonement for sin,—exclaim with their poet

‘ Know all this truth—enough for man to know,
 ‘ Virtue alone is happiness below,’

* Milner, Vol. 3, c. 3. p. 374. † Mosheim, Vol. 6, p. 299.

‡ Jerome's writings contain an excellent comment on this doctrine, ‘ *Hæc hominibus sola perfectio si imperfectos se esse noverunt,*’—this is the only perfection of men to know themselves imperfect. Vol. 1, p. 91.

and with many members of the Church of England content themselves with this limited view of happiness without dwelling sufficiently on the important truths contained in the gospel.

The *Quakers* became established in England about the middle of the seventeenth century; they are a class of very active, industrious, and intelligent persons, devoting much of their time to literary pursuits: their religious opinions are to be found in the works of Keith, and the celebrated Penn, and more especially in the elegant Apology of Barclay; but they have lately published a well-authenticated summary of their tenets, and as it contains many interesting particulars on several points which constantly excite our curiosity, we shall extract a portion of it for the use of our general readers. They 'agree with other professors of christianity in the belief of one eternal God the Creator and Preserver of the Universe, and in Jesus Christ his Son, the Messiah and Mediator of the New Covenant;—they reverence those most excellent precepts which are recorded in scripture to have been delivered by our Saviour, and firmly believe that they are practicable and binding on every christian, and that in the life to come every man will be rewarded according to his works; but being persuaded that man without the Spirit of Christ inwardly revealed can do nothing to effect his own salvation, they think this influence especially necessary in the performance of the highest act of which the human mind is capable—the worship of God; and consider, as obstructions to his worship, all forms which divert the attention of the mind from the secret influence of this unction of the Holy One.

They entirely disregard the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper adopted by our church.

These are the principal doctrines which they profess and believe, and we now come to the detail of their mode of discipline. 'As we dare not encourage'—they declare—'any ministry but that which we believe to spring from the influence of the Holy Spirit, so neither dare we attempt to restrain this influence to persons of any condition in life, or to the male sex alone; but as male and female are one in Christ, we allow such of the female sex as we believe to be endued with a right qualification for the ministry, to exercise their gifts for the general edification of the church; and this liberty we esteem to be a peculiar mark of the gospel dispensation as foretold by the prophet Joel, (ii. 28, 29,) and noticed by the apostle Peter, (Acts ii. 16, 17).*

It is well known that they object to the use of oaths, and also to the names of the months of the year as they are in general use, in consequence of their having been given in honor of the heroes or false gods of the creation, and had their origin in flattery and superstition; and they never speak to a single person in the plural number, as having arisen also, as they state, from motives of adulation.

'Compliments, superfluity of apparel and furniture, outward shows of rejoicing and mourning, and observation of days and times,' they esteem to be 'incompatible with the Christian faith,' as also public diversions and other vain amusements of the world.

To effect this salutary purpose of discipline, district

* See, however, the language of St. Paul in i. Cor. c. 14, v. 34.

meetings are regularly appointed to be held every month, to be under the control and direction of general annual meetings. To these monthly assemblies belongs the allowing of marriage; 'those who intend to marry appear together and propose their intention to the monthly meeting, who appoint a friendly committee to enquire, amongst other things, whether they are clear of other engagements respecting marriage, and if at a subsequent meeting no objections are reported, and the parties come and declare the continuance of their affectionate resolutions, they have permission to solemnize the intended marriage. This ceremony is performed in a public meeting for worship, when the parties stand up and solemnly take each other for husband and wife; a certificate of the proceedings is publicly read, and then signed by the happy parties, (*calamo tremente*,) and also by the relatives and others with their various names as witnesses; of such certificates the monthly meeting keeps a record, as it does also of births and burials. The naming of their children and the burial of their dead are performed without ceremony; 'but it frequently falls out that one or more friends present have somewhat to express for the edification of those that attend.'

The opinions of the Quakers generally are decidedly in favour of a republican form of government both in church and state, as they believe that no one member of their society has a right to claim or receive pre-eminence over the rest, but that every thing should be in subjection only to Divine Wisdom; or, in other terms, they conform themselves entirely to a supreme theocracy. They are proverbially benevolent to each other,

and we never recollect seeing any one of their members in a state of vagrancy or destitution; and they are always ready and anxious to co-operate in promoting all public or private objects of charity.

There are but few of the society resident in the town, they have, however, a place of worship on the North Brink, which appears to have been dedicated to its present purpose for several years past: a small burial ground is attached to it, completely secluded from the busy scenes of life: there is a grave surrounded by the box shrub in the shape of a coffin, exhibiting the initials 'I. S.' with the words and figures 'aged 88. 1742.' and is supposed to record the sepulture of one of the descendants of the royal family of Stuarts.

The *Baptists* dissent from those articles of the Church of England which relate not only to the ordinance, but the objects of baptism. They do not administer it by sprinkling, but by immersion, and not to infants, and to those adults only, who have been well instructed in the important truths of christianity, contending that the command given by our Saviour to the apostles to baptize all nations, was preceded by a special injunction to teach them the gospel, which could not be understood by infants. The constitution of their assemblies, election of their pastors, and mode of worship, much resemble those of the Independents.

They have a place of worship on the north, and a burial ground on the south side of the Crescent; their congregation may be estimated at about 400 persons, but not more than one half are regular members: we cannot, however, state the number with any certain degree of accuracy, as they are the only society that

have neglected to reply to our enquiries for information on the subject.

There is another society of Baptists who have been erroneously termed Johnsonians: their tenets are nearly allied to those of the Particular Baptists. They maintain the doctrines of eternal and unconditional election without reprobation, so far as it is consistent with the will of God that all mankind should be saved, and with the declaration that Jesus Christ gave himself a ransom for all in the fullest acceptation of the term: they entertain the highest regard for, but do not adopt altogether, the opinions of Johnson of Liverpool, as they are recorded in his works. This society, which was established in the year 1722, formerly occupied the chapel in Deadman's Lane, but some of the members having avowed opinions bordering on Socinianism, they separated from them in 1792, and in order to avoid any contention about the chapel, built another in Ship Lane, now called Upper Hill Street, where they have continued to assemble for public worship. Their members are about 150; they administer baptism to adults only by immersion, and are very strict as to the character of the parties admitted to receive the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Their burial ground is in New Wal-soken; it is planted with the purple beech tree, and acacia, and also with shrubs and flowers, presenting that character for peacefulness which is so completely in unison with our ideas of a resting-place for the remains of the departed.

All the dissenters that we have enumerated, with the exception of the Quakers, are compelled by law to adopt the marriage ceremony set forth in our Common

Book of Prayer; but there is every probability that the legislature will shortly relieve them from an unwilling conformity in this respect, and remove every other disability against which they can entertain any reasonable ground of complaint; and although this subject at present excites great animosity of feeling, we hope the day is not far distant when it will completely subside.

The christian world must always consider itself indebted to the dissenters for their missionary exertions, and for the abolition of slavery, and it should always be had in remembrance that we all unite in protesting against popish idolatry on the one hand and infidelity on the other, and that whether Churchmen or Methodists, Baptists or Independents, we are all animated by one faith and one hope, and should endeavour, as far as possible, 'to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.'

CHAPTER XI.

Public Buildings and Works.

THE country by which Wisbech is surrounded is so completely divested of every thing that is ornamental either in natural scenery or the designs of man, that the stranger is very agreeably surprised on entering the town, to see its neat and uniform appearance. It may, however, generally be observed, that in the more romantic portions of our sea-girt isle, the towns very seldom present any architectural beauties, as if the mind of man shrunk with a feeling of religious awe from placing his little contrivances in competition with the grand and stupendous works of the world's great architect, and confined its operations to places where there is but little to distract the taste or tame the fancy. We have observed this more particularly to be the case throughout the whole kingdom of Holland, which is a country bearing a strong resemblance to this district of the Fens: the towns of Holland, like our own, are situate in a tract of country flat but fertile, and the

inhabitants seem to turn from the desolation on all sides presented to their view, and congregate together in the towns, where they expend a portion of the wealth derived from the soil, in the construction of comfortable dwelling-houses for themselves, and buildings for the use of the public.

The town has frequently been compared to the towns of Holland as to its construction, being built on the banks of the river, which winds its way through the principal streets; but here the houses are very inferior in height and extent to those on the Continent, and there are no double, and in many cases triple, rows of trees, which are there planted on the verge of the canals, giving a welcome shade from the meridian sun, and with the combined effect of the moonlight on the waters, presenting an appearance which we can so fully recollect, but could very faintly describe.

The best view of the town is from the bridge; and the circular form of the street following the course of the river, with its gas-lamps at equal distances and brilliantly illuminated, has a very pretty effect.

The Bridge is built with stone, having handsome balustrades on each side: the span of its arch is seventy-two feet, but the road over it is so much contracted that two carriages are not enabled to pass over together; and the descent from the centre is so steep, that accidents frequently occur in consequence of the impossibility of checking the rapid movement of heavily laden vehicles. It was contemplated by the corporation about two years since, to devote the whole of the present bridge to the carriage way, and construct cast-iron foot paths on the outside of the arch; but they were

induced to abandon their design, under an apprehension that the effect of the improved outfall, and the consequently rapid course of the waters, might endanger the whole structure: if, however, the road-way were macadamized, the danger to passengers would be materially diminished.

There was formerly a bridge of wood, but it was demolished in the year 1758, and the present bridge was constructed at an expense of about £1800.: on the foundation-stone was recorded the following inscription:

EX LIGNEO
SURREXIT LAPIDEUS,
A. D. 1758.
ESTO PERPETUUS.

We fear, however, that the founders did not construct a monument of a very lasting nature, (ære perennius) and their good wishes as to its perpetuity will not be realized, since the force of the ice floods in winter make rapid inroads on its foundation, and frequently place it in considerable jeopardy. The expense of its repair devolves on the corporation.

The *Corn Exchange*, or Exchange Hall as it has since been denominated, is the next most striking object; it was erected by the corporation in the year 1811, for the purpose of providing accommodation for the merchants and farmers on the market day. The merchant, however, soon discovered that the eye of his competitor was not confined exclusively to the partition of territory allotted to his own use, but was rather actively engaged in watching the movements of his neighbour,—the price and quantity of corn that he purchased,—and what particular farmers became his

regular attendants; and those feelings of jealousy and suspicion, which unfortunately usually accompany an extension of commerce and personal competition, induced the merchants to abandon their public position, and retreat to their respective private places of business, where they might set a value on the commodity, and on the accommodation previously rendered to the farmer, in greater security and without the observation either of their neighbours or the public. The corn exchange therefore became entirely deserted, and the capital burgesses, in the year 1831, caused it to be inclosed, and converted into a room for concerts, lectures, and other public meetings and exhibitions. The rooms over it are used as billiard and news rooms, but we confess we should rejoice to see the whole of the building devoted to an extensive public library and museum; and this might very easily be accomplished by the corporation granting a long lease of it at an adequate rent, and the expenses of this establishment (or Athænaum,) being provided by subscribing shareholders.

At the back of the corn exchange is an extensive plot of ground used as a cattle market: it was found, however, to afford so little accommodation, that in the year 1827, the capital burgesses purchased another piece of land on the north side of it and separated from it only by the public street, for the sum of £800.; the greater part of this sum was borrowed on mortgage of the land; and the money required for building the corn exchange and public inn adjoining to it, was borrowed by way of annuity when money was scarce at rather an extravagant rate; and although the rents of the cattle-market tolls, and of the public inn, together with those

of the news and billiard rooms, are appropriated towards the liquidation of the debt, there still remained due from the estate in November, 1833, the sum of £5113., independent of a mortgage of £500., which can only be gradually discharged on the decease of the several annuitants.

The *House of Correction* now claims our notice. There is, perhaps, no subject, with the exception of education, that has lately claimed so much attention from the philanthropist as prison discipline. The public were first awakened to this subject by the celebrated Howard, who, being called upon in the year 1773 to fill the office of High Sheriff for the county of Bedford, and observing with horror the privations and misery of the prisoners that were placed in his custody, used every exertion to effect a complete reformation in the whole system of imprisonment: for this purpose he not only visited all the prisons in England, but those in Germany, France, Switzerland, Russia, Austria, and indeed all the principal states of Europe, and having published from time to time the results of his enquiries, the British Parliament at once availed themselves of his experience, passed a series of laws to remedy many of the evils so justly complained of, and gave every encouragement to the erection of gaols and houses of correction upon new and better principles.

It was not, however, until the year 1807, that our house of correction was built; and in consequence of the error, which is so constantly made in local public works of allowing the plans and designs to be made by provincial architects, very little regard was had in its construction to a proper classification of the prisoners:

the principal part of the cells have their grated openings to the public streets, and being placed over each other, the prisoners have an uninterrupted communication, which tends very materially to lessen the punishment intended to be inflicted upon them.

The want of some healthy, laborious, and at the same time profitable employment for the prisoners, was an evil long and seriously felt in prison discipline;* but this evil was in a great measure removed in 1820, by the invention of the Tread Wheel by Mr. Cubitt, who, it will be recollected, was employed by the capital burgesses at the time of their completion of the Woodhouse Marsh Cut in 1831. This excellent piece of machinery was introduced into the principal prisons: and in 1828 one of them was constructed in our house of correction, at an expense of about six hundred pounds; it is used as a flour mill. The number of prisoners is generally about thirty.

It appears by the old records, that there was formerly a gaol at Wisbech as well as at Ely, to receive the criminal offenders committed for, and convicted at, the assizes, but it has been suffered to go to decay, and the house of correction has been permitted by the magistrates to be used occasionally as a substitute for that purpose. There existed great doubt for a considerable time on whom the repair of the gaols in the Isle of

* Those who give their attention to this subject will be much interested in reading an account of the admirable system adopted at Auburn, in North America: it may be found in the several Reports on Prison Discipline; and also in Stewart's and Basil Hall's recently published Travels in America.

Ely devolved, and in 1767 the attorney and solicitor generals were consulted on the subject, and as they were of opinion that it devolved on the bishop of Ely as lord of the franchise, Dr. Mawson consented to repair that at Ely;* the expense of building and repairing the house of correction is of course raised from the Isle rate.

The *Sessions House*, or what is commonly called the Shire Hall, is part of the same building, and in it are held the Lammas Assizes, and also the Midsummer and Epiphany Sessions; the other alternate sessions and assizes being held at Ely.

The *New Town Hall* was erected in 1801, on the site of a building called 'The Firkin Cross,' which, as its name imports, was the place used as the butter market. There was formerly a considerable trade in this commodity, and as many as eight thousand firkins have been exported to London in one year; but from the want of capital in these agricultural districts, and from the erroneous system of the small farmers being proprietors instead of tenants, and the principal part of their money being locked up in the purchase of land, which should only be resorted to as an investment for surplus capital, nearly the whole of the grass land, excepting that in the immediate vicinity of the town, has been converted into tillage, and those pastures and meadows which were once the pride of all England, are now chiefly confined to the beautiful counties of Leicesters and Somerset, and the luxuriant and romantic valleys of Devonshire.

The lower part of the new building was, after its first

* Bac. Abr. 6 Ed. tit. Gaols.

erection, used as a wool cross, but it is now appropriated for the sale of poultry on the market day. One division of the upper part is now used as a custom-house, and the other is occupied by the ten capital burgesses (the decemviri) as their council-chamber, and contains all the important records of the corporation; in it are also the small carved tablet bearing the likeness of King Edward, which has been referred to in a former part of our work, and a portrait of Dr. Jobson, the late vicar, whom we have recorded as so great a pecuniary benefactor to the town, and a portrait of Mr. Clarkson, the celebrated advocate for the abolition of slavery, who was a native of the town, and has happily lived to see his favorite measure accomplished, has been lately obtained by the subscriptions of a few patriotic individuals, and is intended to be placed there, it being now deposited for exhibition at Somerset House.

The Port of Wisbech is so connected with the custom-house, that a few remarks as to its trade and rising importance will naturally be expected from us in this place. It appears that as early as the year 1200, ships of considerable burthen resorted to Wisbech; but it must be recollected that at this period the waters of the Ouse discharged themselves through this outfall to the sea, and consequently the wide and well-defined channel made the river less hazardous for purposes of navigation than it afterwards became by the diversion of the waters into the Lynn stream.

The ship money which was levied here during the reign of Charles I., affords a further illustration of the state of its prosperity. A court was held at Norwich to

decide upon the amount of the sums to be contributed within that district, and Wisbech was called upon to contribute three hundred and forty pounds; but the merchants were by no means reconciled to the imposition of this tax, and one of the burgesses of the corporation was dispatched to London, and endeavoured to obtain its remission: deputies were again afterwards sent on a similar embassy, but the result of their applications is not recorded. The levying of such sums as these might be severely felt in that age; but it should be remembered that the whole amount of these exacted contributions was expended in the equipment of a fleet for the security of the kingdom against foreign invasion,—a fleet which in Cromwell's time attained the eminence of dominion over the seas that it has uninterruptedly preserved to the present day: it was, however, one of the pleas on which the people revolted from their allegiance to their king, and although the mode of levying the tax was most unconstitutional, yet it leaves no vindication for the conduct of those fierce demons who with such unmitigated rancour pursued the unhappy Charles to the scaffold.

The height of trading importance to which Lynn had attained in consequence of the diversion of the waters, and also of the trade, from the Port of Wisbech, had induced the merchants and municipal authorities of that town to assume an aristocratical arrogance towards its degraded neighbour, and they took upon themselves the power of limiting the particular places in our port in which vessels should be allowed to discharge their cargoes; but although the merchants of Wisbech had lost their river, the true spirit of English independence

had not ceased to flow in their veins; they indignantly rejected such tyrannical interference, and immediately resorted to the laws of their country for a restitution of their invaded rights: a commission was issued to enquire into the claims of all the parties, and the result was, as might be expected, favorable to Wisbech.

The corporation now turned their attention towards the improvement of the port, and beacons were placed in various parts of the channel to direct the course of the vessels; but the river at this time exhibited a most discouraging appearance. The waters, impeded in their progress, expanded over vast tracts of sand and marsh, and the channel was so shallow and fluctuating, that vessels of the lowest class would scarcely reach the harbour in security; and this appears to have continued even to so late a period as 1727, when the corporation applied for power to unload their vessels at the distance of eight or ten miles from the town, into smaller boats, as it was found impossible for vessels of even thirty tons burthen to navigate the river.

In 1735 a commission was issued to prescribe the boundaries of the port; the report of the commissioners is the only document by which they can at present be ascertained, and they are very vaguely described as extending to the port of Lynn on the one side, and that of Boston on the other.

The gradual decay of the outfall induced not only the merchants but the proprietors of the adjoining lands, in the year 1778, to turn their serious attention to the subject. Kinderly's Cut was executed, and also the various other works that we have previously traced in their progress towards completion; and vessels of 200

tons burthen can now approach the town and discharge their cargoes in security.

The trade has very considerably increased, as will appear by the table in the Appendix, shewing the amount of tonnage on which the dues have been received annually from 1808 to the present time. The imported produce at present consists of coals and timber, and also the general commodities which are retailed by the tradesmen of the town; and the exported produce is principally corn, wool, and mustard seed, which are sent to the Yorkshire and London markets. There was formerly a considerable trade carried on in hemp and flax, and fairs were regularly appointed and still continue to be held for its sale, but at the time of the general peace these commodities were suffered to be imported from Russia at a comparatively trifling duty, and they consequently ceased to be cultivated by the farmers in the surrounding district of the fens. There were also several mills for the crushing of seed, and part of one of these buildings still remains in the Old Market, near to the Chapel of Ease, in a place that yet preserves its appellation of the Oil Mill Yard.

The capital burgesses are the guardians of the port and harbour,—appoint the pilots, harbour master, and other officers,—provide buoys and beacons, and all that is necessary for the safe guidance and mooring of vessels, and are empowered to receive three-pence per ton on all goods and merchandize exported and imported, to supply the necessary funds for these purposes; they are also empowered to receive a further tonnage due of six-pence per ton to pay the interest and provide a gradual reduction of the principal of the debt of thirty thousand

pounds, which was contributed towards the completion of the Nene Outfall Works.

The *Canal* between this town and Outwell was executed in the year 1792. At this period some of the most extensive works of that description had just been completed with the most decided benefit to the commercial interests of the country, and with considerable profit to the parties who had embarked in the undertakings; and several influential merchants of the town were induced to believe that the excavation of a canal from the Wisbech river to the Old Nene at Outwell, by connecting this part of the Isle of Ely with the counties of Norfolk and Suffolk on the one side, and Bedford and Huntingdon on the other, would be attended with a very great extension of their commerce, and corresponding advantage to the parties who might unite in the speculation: a meeting was accordingly held in Wisbech, the amount of capital required was immediately raised in shares of one hundred pounds each, not only by the resident merchants and tradesmen, but by parties residing in the counties of Leicester and Derby, where similar undertakings had so generally prospered, an act of parliament was obtained, and the work rapidly completed; but the high expectations of the share-holders were never realized, as the merchants were unable to compete with those of Lynn in consequence of the tonnage dues and tolls, and the value of the shares gradually decreased, so that they are now readily purchased at twenty pounds each, with all the arrears of interest due upon them. The company have lately expended upwards of three thousand pounds in the construction of a new sluice at Wisbech and repairing that at Outwell; and it is con-

confidently expected that its navigation will be so much improved that the receipt of tolls will consequently be considerably increased; and when the tonnage duties payable to the corporation shall be diminished by the gradual liquidation of their debt, it will occasion a further extension of the trade from this port to the inland counties, and materially improve the revenues of the company.

The *Workhouse* was built in the year 1722, at an expense of upwards of £2000. The custom of giving general relief had been carried to such a ruinous extent that the parishioners entered into a resolution to erect a building of such dimensions that all paupers applying for parochial assistance for their support, might be admitted within its walls; and they resolved not to give any relief to those who should refuse to reside there; but, unfortunately for the interests of all classes of society, this resolution was not long adhered to, and the evil was suffered not only to exist, but to increase, as well in this parish as in almost all other parts of the kingdom; and the amount of rates raised for the relief of the dissolute and idle, as well as the disabled and afflicted poor, became a serious and intolerable burthen to the agricultural and commercial districts. The legislature has happily interposed to check its further progress, and the same system which was adopted in this town at the commencement of the last century, has become the basis of the general law of the land.

The workhouse is capable of accommodating about three hundred persons; but there has been little regard paid to order and regularity in its management. We are now, however, induced to hope that the subject will

receive a more serious consideration, since not only parliament has given its powerful aid, but, in our opinion, a far more gratifying and important assistance has been rendered to the cause. The vicar has promptly stepped forward and sent forth an address to his parishioners, couched in terms at once devout, and always impressive when emanating from a christian pastor in the discharge of his duty, in which various rules that have been successfully adopted, with but little variation, at Brighton and other populous places, are recommended for the better regulation of the workhouse: whatever opinions may be entertained, and with certain modifications, we are of the same persuasion, that the clergy have higher and much more pressing and important claims on their valuable time and their talent in attending to the spiritual charge committed to their care, than in the administration of civil laws; yet we must all readily agree that the regulation of the well-being of the poor, forming part of their flock, is a truly legitimate sphere for their usefulness, and we most ardently hope that every parishioner will gladly obey the summons, and co-operate with the vicar in carrying his excellent plan into execution, as it will not only ensure an undeviating regard to the wants, the health, and *happiness* of the poor, (since poverty must never be treated and punished as a crime); but above all it will tend to awaken their minds to the cheering and comfortable influence of religion by a daily repeated exercise of its important duties.

The object of the recent Act of Parliament is to encourage the union of parishes on a similar plan to that long since adopted in the adjoining county of Norfolk, and that workhouses on an enlarged scale should be

provided for each district or union, the parishes contributing to their support in the relative proportion to the numbers of their poor: and it expressly provides that the overseers of the poor shall not give relief, excepting in cases of accident or sudden illness, to paupers out of the workhouse; but a power is reserved for two justices of the peace to order them to depart from this rule when the parties are infirm and totally incapable of labour; and it provides that in all cases such relief shall not be given in money, but in the necessaries of life.

It is true that the idle and depraved (and unfortunately they form at all times a very numerous class) will be very clamorous against the abandonment of a system which has so long fostered their indolence and been an encouragement to their depravity, and they will in all probability exhibit a violent, and to timid minds an alarming, impatience of control, yet every exertion must be made firmly to resist this turbulent spirit, and by the encouragement of industrious habits amongst the poor, (since they will now receive wages in proportion only to their industry,) restore that energy and independence of character so long the pride of the British peasantry, which led them to spurn any application to their parish for support so long as health and strength were preserved to them. There will doubtless occur many cases of extreme distress, which, by the operation of the new law, will be deprived the assistance of the public funds, yet private charity will neither slumber nor sleep, but increase its exertions with the increase of opportunities for its being called into action, and we may always rest assured that whilst the fowls of the air are fed and provided for, the truly necessitous poor will never be forsaken.

The *Market Place* occupies an extensive plot of ground in the centre of the town; it appears by the records that it was paved with 'ragstone' as early as 1549, and in the year 1592 a building was erected by the capital burgesses at the east end of it, and used as butchers' shambles together with a shire hall; and there was also a cross, probably dedicated to St. Peter, which was afterwards converted into an obelisk, but these were taken down in the year 1810 agreeably with the power obtained for that purpose in the act of parliament which is usually called the Town Act, and in the following year it was paved with Yorkshire slabs, at an expense of £1170., £870. being supplied by the corporation, and the remaining £300. out of the highway rates. It does not appear that the space of ground denominated the Old Market has been used for the purpose which its name imports for many years past, as the New Market Place is named as early as 1436, and until the year 1669 the greater part of the Old Market Place was occupied by a large pond, which in that year was cleaned out, and a pump placed near to it for the accommodation of the public.

The *Public Baths* are small but neatly constructed; they were built by subscribing share-holders, and cost about £700. We do not apprehend that they will attract many foreigners or even highlanders to the banks of the Nene, and indeed they are but little resorted to by the inhabitants of the town.

The last and, in our opinion, most important public improvement that has been accomplished in this town is the lighting it up with gas.

The application of gas to purposes of illumination is

of very recent date, but its first discovery may be traced as early as the year 1667, since we find the inflammable properties of gas escaping from the surface of a spring at Wigan, in Lancashire, described in the *Philosophical Transactions* of that year, and in the volume for 1773 there is also an account of a similar gas, or carbureted hydrogen, issuing from a coal-work in Cumberland, being collected in a bladder and burnt through a tube attached to it. It was not, however, applied to any economical or domestic use until the year 1792, when Mr. Murdock, of Soho, used the gas extracted from coal for the purpose of lighting his house and offices at Redruth, in Cornwall, a town which from its very antique appearance, we should never have supposed would have sent forth any new light emanating from modern science. This gas was generated in an iron retort, and conveyed in tubes to different situations, whence it issued through proper apertures, and was then inflamed.

In the years 1803 and 1804, gas-lights were exhibited in London by Mr. Winsor, who obtained a patent for purifying coal gas; but the advantages of this useful discovery were not extended beyond the metropolis and some of the principal manufacturing towns, until the last ten or twelve years; there is now, however, scarcely a place of any importance that is not exhibited by its brilliant powers during the night.

In the year 1828 a proposition was made by one of the capital burgesses—an architect residing in the place—to light the town with gas, and plans and estimates were prepared; but the scheme was not brought to maturity. In the years 1830 and 1831, a correspondence took place between the corporation and Mr. Malam, (an

eminent engineer, who had lighted Kingston upon Hull and several other populous places,) and a proposition was then made by him which forms the basis of his present contract; but no definite arrangement was entered into in consequence of some parties being persuaded that it would be advisable to form a company of share-holders, who might engage in the undertaking; and also from an idea that the flame produced from spirits of tar, which had been adopted in the town of Derby, might probably supersede the use of coal gas; the experiment, however, was tried in the town, and completely failed. During the following year the corporation were too much engaged in arranging their finances after the completion of the Woodhouse Marsh Cut, to give their attention to the subject. In 1833 Mr. Malam renewed his proposition to the corporation, and a contract was immediately entered into, when he engaged at his own expense to erect the necessary works, and also provide and light up public lamps on receiving an annual payment out of their funds, regulated by the number that might be required.

There was considerable difficulty in obtaining a convenient site for the works, but it was at length resolved to construct them on a plot of ground purchased by the contractor for that purpose, near to the Leverington turnpike road; they are now nearly completed, and reflect considerable credit on the architect. The pillar which rears its head with a stately, elegant, and well-proportioned attitude in the air, is one of the most ornamental objects in the town, and we never look upon it in our 'daily walks abroad' without imagining that it will long remain a monument of days that seemed to open with brighter

and happier prospects to those who lived around it; and we never gaze upon the brilliant lustre which is sent forth through each appropriated lamp, without viewing it as a beacon-light of hope cheering us on through the dreary hours of life, and as a pledge of better things to come.

We will now describe the buildings and the works that are attached to them: we do not, however, think it necessary to trace the progress of the improvements made from time to time in the machinery, or to enter into a very minute (and *recherché*) explanation of the chemical combination of gases, but will endeavour to explain as simply and as succinctly as we possibly can, the production of coal gas, and the mode which is here adopted of condensing, purifying, collecting, and disposing of it through all its various changes and channels of communication.

A range of furnaces is constructed, and over them are placed twelve elliptical tubes or retorts, of cast-iron, nine feet in length; these retorts are heated to a well-regulated degree by the furnace until they assume what is called a bright orange-red colour, and then a certain quantity of coals are cast into them, and the lids are closed with the aid of lime, bars being fastened across them so that no air can gain admission: this furnace is lighted with coke, but in other places they are frequently lighted with coals, and the smoke in proportion to the nature of the fuel that is used, escapes through the chimney or pillar which forms so conspicuous an object to the public; but the smoke or vapour produced by the coals in the retorts, and which contains the gas, ascends into what is called the main pipe, fitted up with hy-

draulic joints, it then descends into a cast-iron cistern termed 'the washer,' and passing through water, a portion of its impure qualities are removed; it now travels successively through a range or nest of cast-iron tubes surrounded by cold water, and undergoes the process of condensing; the ammonia and tar by their specific gravity separate themselves, become gradually deposited, and are drawn off into a well used for their reception; the gas thus detached, continues its course to a place where it is finally purified, and this is far the most difficult and important process. It has hitherto been generally effected by means of lime in a state of solution, but it was found to occasion so much unpleasant fluid, which was suffered to be drained off, contaminating all the water that came within its reach, that Mr. Malam has introduced a plan, for which he has obtained a patent, of using lime merely moistened sufficiently to cause it to adhere to a range of grates (about two feet square,) and adjusted at a small distance over each other; and the gas is forced through these grates by the heat of the retorts, which first set it in motion, and having by this process become completely purified, it passes on to the gasometer, a general reservoir for its reception; this is a large cylindrical vessel open at the lower part, and suspended over water by means of pulleys with chains and counterbalancing weights, so as to equalize the pressure as occasion may require. This vessel rises like a balloon as it is filled with gas, and descends as the gas is withdrawn from it to supply the town: pipes are laid from this reservoir in all directions, and the public, by means of branch pipes, are enabled to avail themselves of as much as their necessities demand; the

price is of course regulated by the number of hours which it is permitted to be used, or by the number of cubic feet that are consumed, ascertained by a very ingenious metre contrived for the purpose, which is placed where the branch-pipe enters the dwelling house, and all the gas that is required is made to pass through it, and by the aid of water, and machinery like clock works, the quantity is computed with the most exact precision.

The gasometer will contain about ten thousand cubic feet of gas,—(which we wish to be understood is air and not a liquid as is very generally and erroneously imagined, although the supposed necessity for this distinction will excite a sardonic smile from those who in all probability learned the distinction but yesterday)—and about two chaldrons and a half of coals are generally required for the production of the quantity referred to; but this of course very materially depends on the degree of heat to which the retorts are reduced, the quality of the coals, and upon the general principle of the works and the scientific knowledge of the superintendent.

There is another improvement which has occupied much of the attention of the corporation, and which they have lately been most unexpectedly prevented from completing. We have previously referred to a proposition made by the late Mr. Medworth, for the appropriation of the castle as a grammar school, and for taking down the present building and forming a new street from the market place to the Lynn road, and we have also recorded the rejection of that measure by the corporation, and the consequent demolition of the castle; but the inhabitants of the town were not disposed to relinquish altogether the idea of forming the new street.

A meeting of the burgesses was held 13th November, 1826, and it was then resolved that, in consequence of the dilapidated state of the grammar school and premises, and the great expense that would be incurred in putting them into a perfect state of repair; it was expedient to take down and re-build them, and that it would be desirable to provide a more extensive and commodious site, and dedicate the ground which the present buildings occupy, to the formation of the new street, to be continued through the leasehold estate of Mrs. Clarke to the Lynn road, and the inhabitants of the town were invited to advance the money required to the corporation in the way of loan on bonds bearing five per cent. interest. The sum of £3050. was immediately agreed to be subscribed, but the corporation, in defiance of the resolutions of the meeting, which they had expressly convened for the purpose, and which resolutions were moulded under their directions, and consequently to their perfect satisfaction, at once abandoned the plan, rejected the loan so liberally placed at their disposal, and expended the sum of seven hundred pounds in attempting to repair the school premises; but they have since continued and are still unfit for the residence of the master as well as 'the scholars thither resorting.'

This favorite scheme was, however, not suffered to remain disregarded, but was renewed with increased vigour at the commencement of the present year, (1834). The public street adjoining to the bell estate had been rendered insecure by the operation of the river floods,—the grammar school, notwithstanding all the money that had been expended upon it, was still in a very dilapidated state,—the population of the town had been rapidly

increasing,*—a number of houses had been built of such a class that they tended only to increase the burthen of the poor's rate,—merchants and others who were anxious to carry on their commercial pursuits or to retire from the toils of busy life, had quitted the town, or were deterred from taking up their residence in it in consequence of the impossibility of their obtaining suitable houses, or of purchasing vacant ground to build them upon: it was under these various, pressing, and important circumstances deemed advisable, if practicable, that the corporation should purchase the greater part of Mrs. Clarke's land near the Lynn road, and re-sell it in building lots, with restrictions as to the extent and dimensions of the houses to be erected; but they were aware that parliament would not compel Mrs. Clarke to sell the land for the purposes contemplated, and therefore used every exertion to purchase her interest in the property, it being 'leasehold for lives,' and held of the bishop of Ely, and they at length succeeded in arranging a contract with her. The next step was to obtain the consent of the bishop, not only as visitor of the grammar school, but as owner, in right of the see, of the land subject to the lessee's life interest therein. A communication was therefore made to the vicar, (Rev. H. Fardell, son in law to the bishop,) and a plan of the whole scheme was laid before him; and he afterwards informed the corporation that he had consulted with his lordship on the subject, who had expressed himself favorable to the measure; that his lordship's professional adviser,

* By the census of 1821 it was reported to be 6515; but it is now supposed to have increased at least one sixth.

Mr. Pickering, had also been consulted, and that he saw no objection to the principle, provided the details were satisfactorily arranged; and that the corporation were at liberty, if they thought proper, to proceed with their plans. With this encouragement the corporation devoted a considerable time to mature their arrangements, not only to effect the contemplated improvement, but to arrange a new and more effective system as to the appointment and management of the pilots, and to make proper provisions as to the gas-works. A meeting of the burgesses was convened 6th February, 1834, when the whole measure was fully developed, the calculation and estimates were laid before the public, and it was unanimously resolved that it should be proceeded with forthwith, that the money should be provided by loan as arranged in the year 1826, and that a bill should be introduced into parliament to give the requisite powers to the corporation.

There were, however, some few of the inhabitants whose interests were opposed to the plan, and others of rather an influential class, who had rejected Mr. Medworth's proposition, and although they expressed no open hostility at the meeting, yet used their exertions to prevent the raising of the subscriptions; but this difficulty was soon surmounted by the capital burgesses, who engaged to advance one third part of the required loan out of their own private property, and within four days from the meeting, the committee appointed to negotiate the loan of £3000. reported that their efforts had been crowned with success.

The corporation now proceeded to prepare the bill, and another meeting of the burgesses was held on the

14th April, when a violent opposition was unexpectedly raised by parties, who had previously approved of the measure: this opposition was, however, patiently and successfully combated by the corporation, the clauses were debated in regular succession, and at length definitely agreed upon; and a committee was deputed to watch the progress of the bill through its different stages in parliament, the members of the county having promised their support. It was introduced into the house of commons under the most favorable auspices, and was read the first time without any opposition; its further progress was, however, suddenly arrested by the bishop, under the advice of Mr. Pickering, withholding his consent to the bill on the plea that his lordship could not, as a trustee, sanction the alienation of the land, although this part of the scheme had been previously stated to form the very basis of the whole improvement. The vicar promptly repaired to the assistance of the corporation, but their united efforts were unavailing; the bishop, or rather his professional adviser, adhered to his determination, and as the rules of the house would not admit of the bill being read a second time without his lordship's written consent, the committee, after repeated, yet fruitless, attempts to effect an amicable arrangement with the see, were compelled, most reluctantly, to abandon the whole measure; and a general feeling of disappointment and dissatisfaction pervaded the town, which will not soon be forgotten or allayed.

The arguments against the bishop giving his consent, even if they had been advanced at an earlier stage of the proceedings, which in justice to the parties should

have been the case, were not, it is conceived, founded in reason or equity: it was admitted that the bishop was a trustee, and it was the very circumstance of his being such that required the power of parliament to enable him to alien, on full compensation being awarded to him; since, if his lordship had held the property as a private individual, a treaty might have been entered into with him, in the same manner as with Mrs. Clarke, without the aid of the legislature.

We most sincerely wish that the bishop had left the question for the decision of parliament, where his interest would have been fairly watched and attended to, and his lordship, like a noble predecessor whose liberality we took so much pleasure in recording in an early part of our work, would have been the means of promoting a great public improvement in a town and in a district where his patronage is principally exercised; it would have tended to cement a kind feeling amongst a large class of persons who look with no favorable views on powers vested in high places, and particularly when those powers are exercised to check public improvements; and the inhabitants of the town would have been spared the bitter feeling of disappointment, that, after devoting their repeated and unwearied attention to the subject, and dedicating their ill-spared resources* to its accomplishment, this, their favorite scheme of improvement, should be thwarted in a quarter where they had most anxiously, and reasonably looked for support.

We have now completed the narrative of the principal

* The expenses incurred by the Corporation amounted to the sum of £672. 13s. 0d.

historical occurrences connected with the town up to the present year, and our difficulties have increased as we have approached the times in which we live, since it is impossible altogether to express our sentiments with the most quiet and well-calculated indifference* on events that are passing around us, and in which we feel a deep and daily increasing interest; indeed we should betray not only our duty to our fellow-townsmen, but to ourselves, were we to do so, since it is imperative on every member of the community, although he may not have passed the meridian of life, or however limited his talent, to protest against every dereliction from the faithful discharge of public duties on the one hand, or an undue exercise on the other, and not to remain a silent and indolent spectator until he has arrived at a period when sickness or old age, independence of fortune, or a love of retirement, may render him incapable or unwilling to take a lively interest in the municipal transactions of his native place; and we cannot estimate that man as having the least pretensions to patriotism, who is deterred from a spirit of adulation or self-interested restraint from expressing respectfully, yet firmly, his candid opinions on questions and events that are closely interwoven with the very existence of our civil as well as religious institutions.

* ' Je sais' observes Condillac, ' qu'on trouvera mes critiques bien sévères; et que la plupart des passages que je blâme ne manqueront pas de défenseurs. L'art d'écrire est un champ de disputes, parce qu'au lieu d'en chercher les principes dans le caractère des pensées, nous les prenons dans nôtre goût; (*c'est-à-dire,*) dans nos habitudes de sentir, de voir, et de juger; habitudes qui varient suivant le *tempérament des personnes*, leur condition, et leur *age*.

CHAPTER XII.

Biography and Conclusion.

WE have frequently had occasion during the progress of this history to complain of the dearth of interest and incidents afforded by its annals; but we should have reserved our lamentation for this concluding chapter, where our last duty is to be performed in commemorating the eminent and literary characters that have been born or flourished in the town: the few names that compose the list are a sad satire on the fens, for although genius is a quality of a purely erratic nature, yet it is very sensibly acted upon by external circumstances, and much is required in fostering it to maturity.

It would be a curious and interesting* enquiry to trace the influence of climate and scenery on the intellectual capacity of man, and to observe innate talent borne down by the weight of what might truly be

* Madden has adverted to this subject, but not very successfully, in his ‘*Infirmities of Genius.*’

designated as atmospheric pressure, or withering away like some neglected plant on the bleak deserts of Arabia; and again to see it occasionally struggling in the manhood and exuberance of its character against the force of surrounding objects: but there are other, and perhaps more powerful, causes than those of climate or scenery that have operated to check the growth of genius in this place; its inhabitants have for many years past, and still are, almost exclusively occupied in commerce and agriculture, and the engagements of active life, and the still more engrossing duties of domestic society leave but little leisure for the man of business to extend his reading or contemplations beyond the ordinary literature of the day; and it is in all probability, with the greater number of us, wisely so ordained, since the mind may be permitted to travel into scientific and speculative enquiries far beyond its strength, and by the fascination, and we may add the secret flattery, of such studies, may be accustomed to dwell so constantly on abstruse and metaphysical subjects, that it is gradually brought systematically to despise those simple, yet useful, interchanges of social intercourse daily presented to our notice, and which, whatever may be advanced by philosophers to the contrary, form one of the most powerful and lasting sources of this world's happiness.

The industry of the inhabitants, moreover, has almost invariably in this highly-favored part of the country been rewarded, if not with wealth, at least with competence, and they have held on the even tenor of their ways, happy in their commercial, and still more happy in their domestic, relations: but genius, let it be remembered, basks indolently beneath the sunshine of pros-

perity, and is only aroused from its slumbers when the storm of adversity or affliction howls around its dwelling, and when sorrows unrevealed, acting as the under-currents of existence, stimulate the mind to exertion, and lead it to explore, and seek comfort in, the dark labyrinths of literature.*

We must not, however, be understood to convey an impression that talent 'ne'er was known to flourish here, the climate is too cold,' since here and there an elegant yet ardent mind takes its flight into the higher regions of science, or wings its way over the milder climate of Italian literature, alights at a fountain prepared by an Alison, a Somerville, or a Burke, and ultimately takes refuge with the sister-spirit of Felicia Hemans in the romantic wilds of the 'Forest Sanctuary.'

We have also recorded the munificent acts of many charitable individuals whose benevolence of character has left a far more lasting memorial than the eulogium of biography could have possibly supplied, and the tongues of generation after generation yet in the embryo of time, will still resound their praises and bless their memory, when these transitory and insignificant pages shall have long since perished in the dust.

There is still the name of Clarkson to which we have previously adverted, that requires a more extensive notice; his life is so mixed up with the abolition of

* The names of Johnson, Savage, Milton, Goldsmith, Fox, Sheridan, Crabbe, Hemans, and Byron, with many others, instantly occur to our memory in proof of this assertion, and

'Think'st thou if Laura had been Petrarch's wife,

'Petrarch had written sonnets all his life?'

African slavery, that we shall enter rather fully into the events and fruits of his career, since it must at all times be a source of interest to contemplate the labours and success of a truly practical philanthropist.

Thomas Clarkson was born in this town in the year 1761. His father the Rev. John Clarkson was master of the grammar-school, where his distinguished son received his early education, until he was transferred to St. John's College at Cambridge. Here circumstances first directed his thoughts to the abolition of African slavery, and the subject afterwards influenced his whole life.

At this period slavery had for three centuries past sustained its eminence of guilt without receiving any check from the humanity of man or the charity of religion, but age, on the contrary, had only added to it fresh and more daring privileges, and stained it with more indelible disgrace. Three hundred ships from the principal commercial nations of Europe arrived annually at the coast of Africa, and, having obtained their human freight by the most rapacious and reckless means, they stole over the ocean like evil birds of prey, and deposited their cargoes on the shores of the Western Isles. A hundred thousand negroes were in this manner annually consigned to heartless masters, and of this number, England transported the horrid disproportion of forty thousand.

There had been many men of humane and sympathising natures, who had sought to awaken a feeling of abhorrence for this guilty mode of commerce, but the influence of wealth had hitherto succeeded in overcoming every assault upon its depravity. The cries of

the sufferers themselves, eloquent with the touching pathos of misfortune, were also disregarded, and there appeared, until the end of the last century, to be but little hope for these neglected captives.

Such was the state of things when the voice of Clarkson was first heard. But previously to this time, the voice of intercession had not been entirely mute, Granville Sharpe, Paley, the excellent bishop Porteus, and Dr. Pickard, master of Magdalen College at Cambridge, had stood forward as the champions of the African slaves. Indeed it was owing to the exertions of the last named individual that Clarkson was brought into the field, for on his appointment to the vice-chancellorship of the university in 1785, it devolved on him to give out two subjects for latin dissertations, and that proposed for the senior bachelors of arts was, 'Anne liceat invitos in servitutem dare?' Is it right to make slaves of others against their will?

Mr. Clarkson was then at the university, and at once entered the lists as a competitor for the prize. He occupied the very short time that was allotted for the purpose in collecting materials for the task, and not only in books did he seek for information, but sought out, and discovered persons, who had been actually engaged in the African slave trade, and thus strengthened by facts the philosophy of the question. His exertions were successful, and upon the adjudication of the prize he found himself entitled to the first honor. He was further rewarded for the enthusiasm, spirit, and right reasoning with which he had developed the subject, by a request from some of the most ardent abolitionists that he would permit his essay to be

translated into English, in order that it might become extensively circulated.

This request was of course acceded to by Mr. Clarkson; and he was very shortly afterwards introduced to Mr. Dillwyn of Walthamstow, who had established a small society for effecting the abolition of slavery, and he now deemed it a good opportunity for preparing measures of a more solid character to effectuate the object which he had in view.

Mr. Clarkson was actuated by that instinctive feeling of predestination which often kindles enthusiasm. He thought, as he informs us in his *History of the Slave Trade*, from which the principal facts of this biographical sketch are selected, that he could distinguish the gloom which had so long been suspended over Africa gradually dispersing—that the morning star of her liberty was rising, and that he might be selected as one of the instruments to promote such a religious work. Influenced by these feelings he became unsettled, and could not relish any subject that did not in some measure seem to forward his views, nor could he be prevailed on to deviate one step from the path, which he secretly yet firmly felt that Providence had prepared for him.

The deliberation and conflict of his mind, the misgivings and secret springs of inspiration and courage that alternately depressed and elated him, the proud consciousness of disinterested integrity, (*'mens conscia recti'*;) and again, a reluctance to force an obscure name prematurely on the scrutiny of the envious and the proud, caused a long series of painful deliberations in his mind. At length, however, the pure genius of philanthropy triumphed: he overcame every scruple, and

determined to devote his time, his energies, his fortune, and even his whole life, if it were required, to the cause.

The first object which he had in view was, to make the state of slavery more generally known. He accordingly gained introduction to persons who, in Africa and the West Indies, had witnessed every minute horror of the trade. He visited slave ships, learnt their construction, the number of victims which they carried, the articles by which they traded, and the mortality of the unhappy captives during their voyage. He also communicated with members of parliament who were favorable to the cause, and furnished them with facts to illuminate and strengthen their arguments; and amongst the most attentive of his correspondents was Mr. Wilberforce, the author of the excellent treatise on Practical Christianity, who afterwards so ably distinguished himself in exposing the miseries of this unchristian traffic, and who at once pledged himself to bring the subject before parliament.

Mr. Clarkson now drew up his summary view of the slave trade, which was published by the committee of the Anti-Slavery Society. This pamphlet consisted of a short, but eloquent and argumentative, view of the question, detailing the arts used for ensnaring the unsuspecting negroes, their treatment during their transportation, and on their arrival in the West Indies. It was soon very extensively circulated, and the sympathy which it naturally excited, instilled additional hope into the spirited men who were silently, yet effectually, encompassing slavery with destruction. In order to search every channel of information and prove the correctness of all that had been written or advanced on the subject,

he visited the different ports of the kingdom whence slave ships annually departed. He first proceeded to Bristol, and during a visit of seven or eight weeks again examined the vessels engaged in the trade, making himself acquainted with the events of their former voyages, collecting chains, hand-cuffs, thumb-screws, and other instruments of torture and security. In Liverpool and at Lancaster he pursued the same persevering enquiries, regardless of the threats and censures of the merchants and ship-owners; and after an absence of about five months, returned to London, in the month of December, 1789.

The appealing language of the reports had now excited a strong feeling of interest and indignation in the public mind, and an investigation on the part of government was loudly called for. At length the king acceded to the request, but the traders of Bristol and Liverpool endeavoured to distort the evidence with such tact and ingenuity as to induce a belief at first, that the abolitionists had been tampering with the subject. But the journeys of Mr. Clarkson had so familiarized him with the movements of these parties, that he was enabled at once to counteract their united efforts. He lost not a day in repairing to Liverpool, sought out and marshalled a host of respectable and disinterested witnesses, and brought before the committee such evidence as at once set forth this horrible trade in its true, yet most gloomy colours.

The masterly essay ‘On the Impolicy of the African Slave Trade,’ which was published by Mr. Clarkson in 1798, tended to add flame to the indignation already excited throughout the kingdom, and the subject was at

length brought before parliament, but it lingered there during the tedious space of eight years before any important measure was accomplished. In 1807, however, the bill for the abolition of the African slave trade was carried triumphantly through its various stages, and Mr. Clarkson, after twenty years unwearied exertion and watchfulness, saw one of the principal objects of his holy ambition fulfilled. He now turned from the busy scenes of life into domestic retirement. The subject which had agitated his mind for so long a time was partially set at rest, and it now remained for him quietly and patiently to contemplate its effects, and enjoy the reward of his labours—the satisfaction of having dedicated so large a portion of his time, his fortune, and his talent, to the rescuing of thousands of his fellow creatures from the horrors of slavery.

In addition to the works to which we have adverted, Mr. Clarkson published, in 1789, a pamphlet ‘On the comparative efficiency of the regulation or abolition as applied to the Slave Trade;’ in 1791, ‘Letters on the Slave Trade, and the State of the Nations in those parts of Africa contiguous to Fort St. Louis and Goree;’ in 1806, ‘The Portraiture of Quakerism,’ in 3 vols. 8vo.; in 1807, ‘Three Letters to Planters and Slave Merchants;’ in 1808 he completed ‘The History of the Rise, Progress, and Accomplishment of the Abolition of the African Slave Trade by the British Parliament,’ in 2 vols. 8vo.; and in 1813, appeared (also in 2 vols. 8vo.) the ‘Memoirs of the private and public Life of William Penn.’

Although the African slave trade was at length abolished, yet the ultimate object of Mr. Clarkson, and

his coadjutors, was the entire emancipation of the slaves in all our colonies; but they well knew that this grand scheme could not be accomplished without very considerable difficulty, labour, and delay, since the immense capital that had been so long embarked in that most iniquitous trade, would ensure an interested, powerful, and lasting opposition to all their projects. But the same prophetic spirit that first awakened the mind of Clarkson to its high calling told him, although his friends around him had yielded to the influence of despair, that the day was slowly, yet gradually and certainly approaching when all his hopes would be realized, and the glad tidings of freedom be conveyed to every slave in the British dominions.

In 1823 he published another pamphlet on Negro Emancipation; and although forty years had elapsed since he first became enlisted in the cause, his spirit was as glowing and as powerful as ever, and he wrote with the same energy and argumentative force as when he first called upon the nation to weigh its crimes and its laws in the balance of justice.

We cannot pursue the subject through its tedious delay; but Mr. Clarkson has happily lived to see the long wished for day* arrive, when the character of the British people was redeemed from the disgrace of supporting a system, the most cold-hearted and criminal that was ever devised by man or sanctioned by nations.

It is always a matter of astonishment to us that this

* On the 1st day of August, 1834, Slavery was abolished by Act of Parliament on compensation being awarded to the Slave Owners out of the Public Treasury.

subject is so very little discussed or even thought of, and indeed any interest expressed in favor of emancipation has always, even amongst the better educated classes of society, been deemed the offspring either of political excitement or religious enthusiasm; but when the diffusion of well purified intelligence shall have softened down the harsher points of human character—when the present political conflict shall have passed, and religious prejudices in some measure have subsided, slavery will be remembered only with feelings of horror, and it will scarcely be believed that such a system could ever have been so long and so barbarously tolerated.

The laws of barbarism have never struck out into such enormous and wide-wasting cruelty; the fierce nature of the tyrant is seen only in his moments of phrensy—the dreadful revenge of the savage is generally the effect of some pre-conceived injury; but in West Indian slavery there was nothing to arrest our feelings of indignation, to ease the anguish of pity, or mitigate the frown of justice; and the philanthropist turned aside from the heart-rending scene—felt that his intercessions were unavailing—and looked* to the Supreme Power at the appointed time to redeem these much injured people.

Mr. Clarkson is now in his 74th year, and resides at Playford Hall, near Bury St. Edmund's, in Suffolk. His

* We lately read of an apparently well-authenticated circumstance which we shall never forget. 'A Slave was undergoing the severity of his punishment, when he exclaimed in the anguish of his soul, 'I will tell this to my God!' His cry was heard—Slavery is no more.

memory will be cherished by thousands, and we hope that his portrait will long remain amongst the inhabitants of this place as a memorial of an excellent and truly pious man; and whilst it recalls to mind his noble exertions for the benefit of his fellow creatures, it will tend to foster feelings of benevolence and good-will in the hearts of the rising generation, and they will learn that excellence of character and real practical christianity will always ensure the respect of both public and private friends, and that it will never be disregarded or forgotten.

Whilst the name of Clarkson is so conspicuous on the list of champions in the cause of emancipation, that of William Ellis stands pre-eminent amongst the missionary pastors; although he was not born in this town, yet he has been so constantly connected with the place by the residence of his parents and his early education, that we willingly avail ourselves of the opportunity of recording the talent, zeal, and energy which he has displayed in his literary and missionary labours.

William Ellis was born in London, in the year 1794, but was brought by his parents to this place at the age of 4 years. During the early part of his life he exhibited traits of persevering industry, and an anxiety to obtain information on subjects that rarely excite the attention of persons in his station of life, since he was compelled by the poverty of his parents to obtain the means of subsistence in the usual routine of domestic servitude. Becoming accidentally acquainted with a family in London who were members of the Wesleyan connexion, his attention was called to the exertions of the missionaries in the promulgation of the gospel in foreign lands;

he at once expressed an anxiety to unite with them in their labours—lost no time in making himself acquainted with the duties of such an important office, and in 1815, at the early age of 21 years, was declared competent to undertake the responsibility of a mission to the Georgian and Society Islands.

He embarked from Portsmouth in the month of January, 1816, but in consequence of the many delays attending such a long and perilous voyage, did not reach Eimeo, the place of his destination, until the month of February in the following year. Immediately on his arrival he proceeded to make himself acquainted with the language of the natives, and the rapidity with which he accomplished this difficult task, at once displayed his superior talent and habits of application.

These Islands had, as early as the year 1797, been distinguished as a missionary settlement, and part of Tahiti, the largest of the Georgian group, had at that time been ceded to the Christians: but the ancient and fierce system of idolatry, so congenial to the uncultivated mind, had, until within a short period of Mr. Ellis's arrival, sustained its supremacy; and on an irruption of the natives in 1808, the missionaries were compelled for their personal safety to take shelter in the neighbouring, but more friendly, settlement of Eimeo.

On his arrival, however, christianity had made rapid strides in subduing the unruly passions of the inhabitants, and he at once availed himself of the auspicious opportunity of increasing the claims of the Society on the gratitude of the people, by not only communicating the glad tidings of the gospel, but also by introducing amongst them a knowledge of the useful arts and

sciences of civilized life. He taught them to avail themselves of the fertility of their lands, and gave them encouragement and instruction in agricultural pursuits and mechanical contrivances; and was at the same time desirous that they should gradually acquire a taste for the first rudiments of literature. With this view he had taken with him from England, a printing press and types, which he now proceeded to set up in Eimeo, and the first sheet of a spelling book was worked off by the native king of the Island, Pomaré II., a prince, who, although the greatest enemy to christianity on its first introduction, soon afterwards became its most strenuous advocate and friend.

Mr. Ellis used his unwearied exertions in the cause in which he had embarked, and soon became one of the most active and valuable of the missionaries. It is, however, through the medium of his own literary productions that we can principally trace the extent of his mind and qualifications.

His first publication 'A Tour through Hawii,' appeared in 1826, and like his more recent and more important work the 'Polynesian Researches,' it details every incident connected with his mission, the state of the Island, the manners, history, and traditions of the inhabitants, with every other species of information that an enquiring mind and habits of judicious observation could possibly collect.

In his Polynesian Researches he has dwelt particularly on all the singular customs of these savage tribes, and its pages present a sad catalogue of the crimes and depravity of man in a state of barbarism: polygamy, infanticide, polytheism, and a train of the most awful

superstitions and revolting habits of voluptuousness appear to have long been exercised by the natives without the least intermission or control. But all these dreadful scenes have passed away and yielded to the influence of christianity; and cold must be our hearts if we do not glow with delight and feelings of gratitude whilst we are led to contemplate—by a perusal of these interesting volumes—the gladdening prospect of thousands of our fellow creatures rescued from a savage state of idolatry to a knowledge of the true God, and when we are led to reflect that this conversion of the heathen is working out the gradual, yet certain, development of one of the last and one of the most important of the prophecies that remain to be fulfilled.

Mr. Ellis has returned from his mission, but his time is still devoted to his favorite occupation, being engaged as one of the agents to the Missionary Society; and the indisputable facts which he has collected by his residence in Polynesia, and the knowledge which he has acquired by his indefatigable application to literature, must render his services highly valuable to the institution.

Since the commencement of this work a highly respectable individual has been removed from us, and we gladly avail ourselves of the opportunity of paying to his memory a passing tribute of respect. The name of the late *William Watson, Esquire*, is well known to our readers; his unbounded acts of charity, and his benevolence, having obtained for him almost universal respect.

In early life Mr. Watson was educated for the law, and practised in co-partnership with an eminent solicitor at Boston, in Lincolnshire, where he is still remembered

as a man of the strictest integrity; he did not, however, long continue a member of the legal profession, but removed to this place, and engaged in the brewery business. Soon after his arrival he began to take a great interest in the affairs of the town—became an active magistrate, his name having been introduced into the commission of the peace—was elected a member of the corporation, and in the year 1804 was called upon to fulfil the duties of town bailiff.

In the year 1807 Mr. Watson was appointed by the Earl of Hardwicke to the station of lieutenant colonel commandant of the regiment of volunteer infantry, which had been established in the town in 1797, and on the passing of the act of parliament for the formation of the local militia in the year 1808, the officers of the volunteers were transferred to such service, and he undertook the command of that loyal band of patriots, who were enrolled in the only legitimate cause of warfare—the defence of their country against the invasion of a foreign enemy. The time spent in these domestic, or rather provincial, military movements, and the hours passed in the Falernian banquets and meetings to which they gave birth, formed the happiest portion of Mr. Watson's life; but this happiness was soon drawn to a close. He was induced to enter into the speculation of banking, and opened an establishment in conjunction with Mr. Sheath, a branch of the family engaged in a similar enterprise at Boston. This connexion terminated unhappily; the firm at Boston became bankrupts, and the Wisbech co-partners being involved in some of their transactions, were compelled to suspend their payments.

The character of Mr. Watson stood exceedingly high amongst his neighbours, and they at once rallied round him; he was enabled to pay to his creditors the full amount of their claims, and they presented him with a piece of plate as a testimonial of the honor and integrity which he had displayed throughout the whole of the unfortunate transaction.

Mr. Watson still continued his brewery and other public duties; and in the year 1822, the bishop of Ely very graciously conferred upon him the ancient and honorable appointment of chief bailiff of the Isle of Ely. In 1821 he was again elected town bailiff, and at the urgent request of the capital burgesses, was prevailed upon to continue in that office during the unusual space of two years in succession. His attention was at that time called to the records and public documents in the custody of the corporation, and he at once resolved on writing a history of Wisbech, which was completed and published in 1827. Of that work we cannot of course presume to give an elaborate opinion; but it must be acknowledged by all, that it exhibits very considerable industry and benevolence of feeling; and it has, we may add, much facilitated our labours in completing the early part of our work, and also the materials which will be found in our appendix. This excellent man died at Richmond, in Surrey, in the month of April, 1834: his remains were interred in the baptistry of our parish church—where a neat and appropriate monument has lately been erected to his memory—and many a widow and orphan are left to lament his loss, having at all times found in him a faithful counsellor and a sincere friend.

We have already exceeded the limits prescribed for our work, and must, we confess, rather reluctantly bring it to a conclusion, since the few leisure hours that have been devoted to its composition have been happily, and, as regards ourselves, we trust, usefully spent. From the stern critic we have nothing to hope; his happiness consists in exhibiting, as he conceives, his own superior talent by casting that of others—however humble and unpretending—farther into the shade. We envy not his occupation—we fear not its results. We look confidently towards a band of kind friends—and we hope to find many such amongst our fellow townsmen—knowing that they will perceive the sterility of the subject which we have selected, and the disadvantages under which we have laboured; and that they will be induced generously to extend to us their indulgence and protection where we chiefly stand in need of them. There are associations connected with this work that will ever remain endeared to us, and when we hear the voice of disapprobation or contempt raised against us either in public or private—however defective this work may be pronounced as a literary composition—we shall console ourselves with the reflection that we have not, to our knowledge, yielded in one single instance to the false views of philosophy and impiety which are so prevalent in some publications of the present age; and we shall be cheered by the persuasion that our pages do not convey one sentiment that we should be anxious to disavow, or

‘ One line, which, dying, we would wish to blot.’

A P P E N D I X.

High-Sheriffs for the Counties of Cambridge and Huntingdon, whose Residences were in Wisbech and the Neighbourhood, since 1st Henry VIII, 1509, to the year 1834 inclusive.

A.D.	A.D.
1523 Anthony Hansard, esq. March	1678 T. Wiseman, esq. Whittlesea
1529 Ditto	1681 Robert Swaine, esq. Leverington
1593 John Peyton, esq. Isleham	1696 T. Harrison, esq. March
1595 Robert Brudenell, esq. Doddington	1699 Richard Parlett Read, esq. Chatteris
1604 Sir John Peyton, bart. do.	1705 J. Walsham, esq. March
1628 Thomas Parke, esq. Wisbech	1708 John Jenyns, esq. Doddington
1631 Richard Colvile, esq. Newton	1711 J. Taylor, esq. Wisbech
1634 Robert Balam, esq. Elm	1714 John Marshall, junior, esq. ditto
1647 Tristram Dimond, esq. Upwell	1717 Roger Laxon, esq. Whittlesea
1653 W. Fisher, esq. Wisbech	1723 T. Jenkinson, esq. Elm
1660 W. Colvile, esq. Newton	1729 James Anthony, esq. Wisbech
1666 J. Caryll, esq. Chatteris	
1672 Richard Read, esq. Whittlesea	1732 George Waddington, esq. Doddington
1675 C. Turner, esq. ditto	1735 Jer. Riss, esq. Thorney

A.D.	A.D.
1738 R. Colvile, esq. Newton	1793 Thomas Cole, esq.
1744 R. Gill, esq. Upwell	Doddington
1750 John Sumpter, esq.	1796 John Gardiner, esq.
Walsoken	Chatteris
1754 Henry Southwell, esq.	1799 J. Westwood, esq. ditto
Wisbech	1802 Thomas Aveling, esq.
1757 F. Dixon, esq. Upwell	Whittlesea
1760 Sir P. Vavazor, knt.	1805 J. Marshall, esq. Elm
Wisbech	1808 Sir H. Peyton, bart.
1763 Isaac Young, esq. ditto	Emneth
1766 J. Goddard, esq. Elm	1811 William Dunn Gardner
1769 J. Collier, esq. March	esq. Chatteris
1775 Daniel Swaine, esq.	1820 Thomas Burgess, esq.
Leverington	Benwick
1781 John Johnson, esq. ditto	1823 William Rayner, esq.
1784 Thomas Shephard,	Wisbech
esq. March	1826 Thomas Fryer, esq.
1790 Thomas Ground, esq.	Chatteris
Whittlesea	

So that in 317 years there	Three ditto from Newton
have been nine Sheriffs se-	Three ditto Leverington
lected from Wisbech	Three ditto Upwell
Six ditto March	One ditto Thorney
Six ditto Whittlesea	One ditto Benwick
Six ditto Chatteris	One ditto Emneth
Five ditto Doddington	One ditto Walsoken
Four ditto Elm	One ditto Isleham

*The Chief Bailiffs of the Isle of Ely, appointed by
the Bishop of Ely, as Lord of the Franchise.*

A.D.

- 1294 Robert de Scadeworth.
Roger Abynton.
- 1308 Ralph de Norwich.
- 1329 John Bosse.
- 1445 Roger Davy.
- 1459 John Ansty.
John Mesanger.
- 1468 William Curson.
William Michell.
Matthew Christian.
Jordan de Daventre.
- 1501 John Burgoyne.
- 1516 Edmund Wyngfield.
Thomas de Inglethorpe.
- 1546 Thomas Meggs.
Sir John Huddleston.
- 1600 Thomas Heton, brother to Bishop Heton.
Thomas Edwards, Esq.
- 1661 William Wren, Esq., brother to Bishop Wren.
- 1698 Thomas Edwards, Jun.
- 1725 Charles Clarke, Esq., of Lincoln's Inn.
- 1726 Edward Parthericke, Esq.

- 1749 Thomas Gooch, Esq., eldest son of Bishop Gooch.
1758 Francis Wyatt, Esq.
1770 William Ward, Esq., of Staple's Inn.
1788 Thomas Gotobed, Esq.
1791 Francis Bagge, Esq.
1822 William Watson, Esq., F.A.S.*
1838 Spelman Swaine, Esq., R.N.†
-

* This is the Gentleman referred to in the concluding Chapter.

† This highly respectable and universally respected gentleman is son of the late Spelman Swaine, Esq., of Leverington, whose ancestors appear in the preceding list of the High Sheriffs for the Counties of Cambridge and Huntingdon.

Constables of the Castle.

- 1246 William Justice.
1262 Simon de Dullingham.
1308 Richard de Halstead.
1401 Thomas de Bramstone.
1403 Sir John de Rochford.
1410 Sir John de Colvile.
1446 Sir Andrew Hoggard or Ogard.
1476 Sir Thomas Grey.
1489 Sir Thomas Hobard.
1525 Walter and Miles Hubbard.
1531 Thomas Megges, Arm.
Sir Richard Cromwell.
1605 William Chester, Sen., Esq.
1633 Matthias Taylor, Esq.

The names of such of the ALDERMEN of the Guild of the Holy Trinity in Wisbech, from its Foundation, 2d Richard II., 1379, to its Dissolution, 29th Henry VIII., 1540; and of such of the TOWN-BAILIFFS as are noticed in the Records, from the Incorporation of the Town, in the third Year of the Reign of King Edward VI.

Aldermen of the Guild of the Holy Trinity.

		A.D.
The records commence 2d	Nicholas Outclark	1432
Richard II. A.D. 1379.	—— Sutton	1436
The accountant's expenses	The like	1442
in respect to the guild are the	The like	1443
first transactions stated, after	John Masse	1445
which there is a lapse of	The like	1452
forty-four years, until	The like	1458
	The like	1459
2d HENRY VI.	The like	1460
	A.D.	
John Lambe, alderman	1423	EDWARD IV.
The like	1424	
The like	1425	John Masse
		1461
The like	1427	The like
		1462
The like	1429	The like
		1463
The like	1430	The like
		1464
The like	1431	The like
		1465

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	A.D.		A.D.
John Masse, alderman	1466	Robert Dygby	1487
The like	1467	The like	1488
William Calowe, esq.	1468	The like	1489
The like	1469	John Burwell	1494
The like	1470	The like	1495
The like	1471	Robert Tooke	1496
The like	1472	John Burwell	1502
The like	1473	William Gatesend	1503
The like	1474	The like	1504
Martin Andrew, in ab-		The like	1505
sence of W. Calowe	1475	Dr. Richard Wyatt, vicar	1506
William Calowe, esq.	1476	The like	1507
The like	1477	The like	1508
The like	1478		
Robert Dygby	1479	HENRY VIII.	
The like	1480		
The like	1481	Dr. Richard Wyatt	1509
The like	1482	The like	1510
		The like	1511
EDWARD V.		Nicholas Style	1512
		The like	1513
Robert Dygby	1483	The like	1514
		William Ladd	1515
RICHARD III.		The like	1516
		Thomas Wythe, gent.	1517
Robert Dygby	1484	The like	1518
		The like	1519
HENRY VII.		The like	1520
		Richard Rede	1521
Robert Dygby	1485	The like	1522
The like	1486	The like	1523

	A.D.	His majesty, in the third
Alexander Balam	1524	year of his reign, granted a
The like	1525	charter of incorporation, with
Lawrence Daniel	1526	power to elect, on every 1st
The like	1527	of November, ten of the more
Alexander Balam	1531	honest and more discreet
The like	1532	inhabitants, 'maintaining a
The like	1533	family,' to have the care of
The like	1534	the several affairs of the town,
The like	1535	&c. And by such charter
The like	1536	the following ten men were
The like	1537	nominated in 1550, viz. :—
The like	1538	Henry Goodrick, esq.
The like	1539	Richard Everard, esq.
		John Sutton
The act of parliament		Nicholas Fordham
for dissolution of mon-		John Procter
asteries, passed in	1540	Thomas Crosse
		William Beste
EDWARD VI.		William Perte
		Robert Scorterede
John Proctor, alderman	1547	Thomas Bocker

Town-Bailiffs.

		A.D.
ELIZABETH.	John Williamson	1578
	A.D. Thomas Pierson	1585
Richard Best, gent.	1564 The like	1586
Thomas Crosse	1565 John Ladd	1587
The like	1566 The like	1588
Robert Cooper	1577 The like	1591

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	A.D.		A.D.
William Sturmyrn	1594	Thomas Pearson, gent.	1615
James Saylebank	1596	John Marshall	1616
Robert Tipping	1597	Thomas Procter	1617
Jas. Saylebank, 2d time	1598	Thomas Williams	1618
William Wilkes	1599	The like	1619
Thomas Crosse	1600	The like	1620
Robert Tipping, 2d time	1601	The like	1621
Thomas Crosse	1602	William Twells	1622
		Thomas Williams	1623
JAMES I.		The like, 6th time	1624

Nicholas Sandford, gent.	1603	CHARLES I.	
Thomas Crosse	1604		
Thomas Pigge	1605	Edward Buckworth,	
William Edwards	1606	esq.	1625
Matthias Taylor, esq.	1607	Nicholas Sandford, gent.	1626
John Sandford, gent.	1608	Matthias Taylor, esq.	
John Warner	1609	2d time	1627
Thomas Crosse, 6th time	1610	Thomas Girling, gent	1628
		The like	1629
The king, in the eighth		Anthony Fisher	1630
year of his reign, granted his		Arthur Taylor	1631
letters patent, for incorpo-		James Whynnal	1632
rating the inhabitants; under		Thomas Pigge, 3d time	1633
which charter the first town-		John Day	1634
bailiff appointed was		Thomas Swaine, Edward	
	A.D.	Crosse remainder of	
Anthony Fisher, gent.	1611	the year	1635
Thomas Pigge	1612	John Wilson, gent.	1636
Thomas Edwards	1613	Edward Crosse	1637
Thomas Parke, esq.	1614	William Edwards, jun.	1638

A.D.		CHARLES II.	
Matthias Taylor, Thomas Pigge remainder of the year	1639	William Walsham, gent.	1660
Robert Edwards	1640	Robert Stevens	1661
Thomas Pierson	1641	John Wilson, 7th time,	
Everard Buckworth, esq	1642	Nicholas Sandford remainder of the year....	1662
Nicholas Sandford	1643	James Edwards	1663
John Daniel	1644	The like	1664
William Fisher, esq.	1645	The like, 5th time	1665
Henry Ferroure, gent.	1646	Anth. Buckworth, esq.	1666
John Marshall	1647	John Neale, gent.	1667
Nich. Sandford, 3d time	1648	The like, 2d time	1668
William Edwards, sen.	1649		

COMMONWEALTH.

		This king renewed the town charter, whereby the ten men were to be called 'Capital Burgesses,' and to be elected every 2d November; under which last charter the first town-bailiff elected was	
John Wilson, gent.	1650		
The like	1651		
The like	1652		
The like	1653		
Anthony Balam	1654		A.D.
Robert Twells	1655	John Marshall, gent.	1669
John Wilson, 6th time	1656	Thomas Edwards, esq.	1670
William Fisher, esq.	1657	Robert Vaughan, gent.	1671
James Edwards, gent.	*1658	James Whinnel	1672
The like	1659	John Coxen	1673

* The annual elections of 1658, 1659, and 1660, were held under the authority of letters patent granted by the Protector Oliver.

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	A.D.		A.D.
John Coxen and John Neave	1674	James Whinnel, jun. The like, 2d time	1698 1699
Richard Harrison	1675	Edward Bellamy, esq.	1700
Thomas Flanner	1676	Richard Loake, 2d time,	
John Marshall, 4th time	1677	on his decease Joseph	
Simon Loake	1678	Taylor, 2d time	1701
James Whinnel	1679		
The like, 4th time	1680	ANNE.	
Philip Easinghurst	1681		
John Bellamy	1682	Thomas Cock, gent.	1702
Jonas Brown	1683	Richard Bladwick	1703
Daniel Walker	1684	Robert Twells	1704
		Lawrence Banyer	1705
JAMES II.		Nathaniel Kinderley	1706
		Richard Loake	1707
William Fox, gent.	1685	William Stevens	1708
Oliver Brown	1686	John Kelsall, esq.	1709
Henry Medow	1687	Rev. John Bellamy, clk.	1710
		John Middleton, gent.	1711
WILLIAM AND MARY.		Edward Crosse	1712
		Henry Longstae	1713
William Fox, 2d time	1688		
Henry Laughton	1689	GEORGE I.	
William Tunnard	1690		
James Marshall, sen.	1691	Anth. Lumpkin, gent.	1714
William Allen, gent.	1692	Samuel Vine	1715
Richard Loake	1693	John Marshall, jun. esq.	1716
John Twells, esq.	1694	Rev. T. Cole, clk. vicar	1717
John Barker, gent.	1695	Anthony Lumpkin	1718
Joseph Taylor	1696	John Horncastle	1719
Robert Gynn	1697	James Anthony	1720

	A.D.		A.D.
Thomas Spire	1721	William Long	1747
Richard Taylor, esq.	1722	Joseph Barwick	1748
John Cuthbert, gent.	1723	EdwardSouthwell, esq. .	
Thomas Towers	1724	3d time	1749
Rev. Henry Bull, D.D.		Rev. Henry Burroughs,	
vicar	1725	clerk, vicar	1750
EdwardSouthwell, esq.	1726	John Garland, gent.	1751
		David Waite	1752
		Robt. Wensley, 2d time	1753
GEORGE II.		Thomas Berrier	1754
Henry Southwell, gent.	1727	Henry Southwell, esq.	
James Lowry	1728	2d time	1755
Jacob Norris	1729	Samuel Massey, M.D.	
Charles Vavazor	1730	2d time	1756
James Anthony, esq.	1731	Isaac Young, gent.	1757
Richard Taylor, gent.	1732	John Bellamy	1758
Robert Hemus	1733	Jeremiah Hancock	1759
John Thompson	1734		
Thomas Marlow	1735	GEORGE III.	
William Flanner	1736		
Robert Gynn	1737	William Marshall, gent.	1760
Samuel Massey	1738	Sir Philip Vavazor, knt.	1761
Isaac Young	1739	Edward Warmoll, gent.	1762
Thomas Woods	1740	Hugh Maplesden	1763
John Bellamy	1741	John Southwell, esq.	1764
Edmund Cobb, esq.	1742	John Thompson, gent.	
EdwardSouthwell, esq.	1743	2d time	1765
William Ezekiel Flanner, gent.	1744	George Swaine	1766
		The like	1767
Charles Browne	1745	Thomas Chapman	1768
Robert Wensley	1746	Robert Colville, esq.	1769

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	A.D.		A.D.
Sir Philip Vavazor, knt.		Robert Kilby, gent.	1794
2d time	1776	William Clark	1795
John Waite, gent.	1771	Rev. Cæsar Morgan,	
Henry Burroughs,		D.D. vicar	1796
LL.D 2d time	1772	Rev. Wm. Walker	1797
Wm. Skrimshire, gent.	1773	John Swansborough	1798
Joseph Hancock	1774	Abraham Hardy, gent.	1799
John Warren, D.D.		William Skrimshire,	
vicar	1775	esq. 4th time	1800
Richard Colville, esq.	1776	Charles Laughton,	
John Mayer, gent.	1777	gent.	1801
Thomas Fawcett	1778	Hugh Jackson, jun.	1802
Robert Kilby	1779	Charles Metcalfe	1803
Thomas Newman	1780	William Watson, esq.	1804
William Skrimshire	1781	James Watson, gent.	1805
The like	1782	James Bellamy, 2d	
Robert Stevens	1783	time	1806
James Bellamy	1784	Robert Hardwicke,	
William Smalley	1785	esq.	1807
Rev. T. Sheepshanks,		Steed Girdlestone,	
A.M.	1786	gent.	1808
Mann Hutcheson,		Joseph Medworth, gent.	1809
F.S.A	1787	William Jump	1810
Robert Hardwicke, esq.	1788	Rev. Abraham Jobson,	
William Rayner	1789	D.D. vicar	1811
Hon. and Rev. Charles		William Rayner, esq.	
Lindsay, A.M. vicar	1790	2d time	1812
John Mayer, gent, 2d		Rev. Jeremiah Jack-	
time	1791	son, clerk, A.M.	1813
Josiah King Life	1792	John Edes, esq. 2d	
John Edes, esq.	1793	time	1814

	A.D.		A.D.
Hugh Jackson, jun. 2d		James Usill, esq.	1825
time	1815	William Orton, esq.	1826
Ralph Archbould,		Charles Boucher,	
gent.	1816	gent.	1827
Edmund Ward	1817	Abraham Usill,	
H. J. Nicholls, esq. 1818		gent.	1828

GEORGE IV.

WILLIAM IV.

Robert Hardwicke, esq.		Henry James Nicholls,	
3d time	1819	esq. 2d time	1829
W. Swansborough,		Thomas Steed Watson	
gent.	1820	gent.	1830
W. Watson, esq.		Robert Dawbarn,	
F.S.A.	1821	gent.	1831
The like, 3d time	1822	Henry Ollard, gent.	1832
Steed Girdlestone, esq.		Harley Matthew Usill,	
2d time,	1823	gent.	1833
J. R. Weatherhead,		Henry Leach, gent.	1834
gent.	1824		

Vicars of Wisbech St. Peter.

POPISH.	A.D.
William de Norwold	1252
Dr. Rogers	1338
John Bolin	1349
William de Newton	1384
John Judde or Rudde.....	1401
John Ockham, LL.D.	1422
William Abyinton	—
John Clampain	1448
John Warkworth, D.D.	1472
William Gybbs	1473
William Doughty, LL.D.	1494
John Wyatt.....	1503
Robert Cliffe, LL.D.	1525
John Cheesewright	—
William Lord	1537
William Hande	1544
Henry Ogle.....	1549
Hugh Margesson, A.B.	1554

PROTESTANT.	
Matthew Champion	1587
Joshua Blaxton, B.D.	1613
Thomas Emerson	1615
Edward Furnis, A.M.....	1630

William Coldwell	1651
John Bellamy, A.M.	1702
Thomas Cole, A.M.	1714
Henry Bull, D.D.	1721
Henry Burrough, LL.D.	1749
John Warren, D.D.....	1773
James Burslem, LL.D.	1779
Hon. and Rev. C. Lindsay, A.M.	1787
Cæsar Morgan, D.D.	1795
Abraham Jobson, D.D.	1802
Henry Fardell, M.A.	1831

Inscription on the Monument referred to in page 181.

M. S.

HANNÆ ET CHRISTIANÆ

FILIARUM DELECTARUM

ALEXANDRI FRASER, A. M. M. D.

Qui Medicinam annos fere xxv.

In hoc oppido exercuit

Et Hannæ conjugis ejus

Illa e vitâ decessit Dec. 20^{mo}.

Anno ætatis xix. Dom. mdcccxxii.

Hæc Sept. 15^{to}. Anno ætatis xviii.

Dom. mdcccxxiii.

Eodem morbo heu præmature abreptas

Idem sepulchrum continet

*The following is transcribed from the monument erected
to the memory of the late William Watson, Esq.*

SACRED TO THE MEMORY
OF
WILLIAM WATSON, ESQRE. F. A. S.
LIEUTENANT COLONEL
OF THE CAMBRIDGESHIRE LOCAL MILITIA
DEPUTY LIEUTENANT AND CHIEF BAILIFF
OF THE ISLE OF ELY.

His death took place at Richmond in Surrey
on the 31st day of March, in the 64th year of his age,
And his remains were interred in a vault
Beneath this tablet on the 8th day of April, 1834.

In life this amiable man
Was honoured and beloved by all classes,
And in death lamented ;
In him the poor never wanted a friend,
The embarrassed an adviser, the good a pattern ;
His faith was entirely built upon the merits
of the Saviour's atonement,
And the evidence of it was daily visible
In the consistency of a holy life.
"Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs
is the kingdom of heaven" Matth. 5 c. 3 v.
To record his virtues,
Harriet, his affectionate widow,
Has caused this tablet to be erected.

This tablet fully and faithfully records the character of
the deceased ; we wish however, that some other epithet
had been substituted for the word "holy," as it can only
be strictly applicable to the life of our Saviour.

Masters of the Grammar School.

A.D.	A.D.
1446 Jacob Cresner.	1731 Richard Foster, Clerk.
1548 Henry Ogle.	1749 John Clarkson, Clerk.
1564 Mr. Rastall.	1766 Richard Oswin, Clerk.
1580 Thomas Lowthe.	1796 MartinCoulcher, Clerk.
—— John Power.	1803 Jeremiah Jackson, MA.
1630 William Frisney.	of St. John's College,
1669 George Frisney.	Cambridge.
1678 Francis Fern, M.A.	1826 J. R. Major, M.A. of
1690 Thomas Johnson, M.A.	Trinity College, Cam-
1697 Thomas Carter, Fellow	bridge.
of King's College,	1831 George Harrison Whar-
Cambridge.	ton Thompson, B.A.
1727 John Newson, Clerk.	

Magdalen Scholars under Holmes' Charity.

- 1567 { George Frisney, elected Master of Wisbech
 School, 30th June, 1669.
 Robert Pierson.
 1666 Robert Rastell, dismissed for negligence
 in 1672.
 1669 Thomas Johnson, elected Master of the
 School in 1690.
 1672 Nathaniel Denison.
 1676 Benjamin Cuthbert.
 1678 Robert White.
 1690 { Edward Darker.
 Thomas Allen.
 1700 Henry Green.
 1702 James Barrett.
 1713 John Allen.
 1715 William Brown.
 1743 Thomas Hutchesson.
 1752 William Purkiss.
 1772 James Flanner.
 1794 Thomas Skrimshire.
 1804 John Fisher.
 1820 Thomas Hall. *
 1826 Henry Jackson.
 1832 James Smith.
 1833 Henry Herring.
 1833 Charles Ward.

* Professor of Mathematics at King's College, London.

Corporation Estates.

It appears by a "Schedule of the Possessions of the Guild at Wysbeche," taken in the year 1547, that the following Estates were then under their controul:—

	MESSUAGES.					LANDS.
In Wisbech	4	-	-	-	-	<i>acres</i> —349½
Leverington	1	-	-	-	-	127
Newton	-	-	-	-	-	7½
Tydd St. Mary	-	-	-	-	-	6
Elm	-	-	-	-	-	7
Emneth	-	-	-	-	-	40
Walton	-	-	-	-	-	9
Walpole	1	-	-	-	-	70
	<hr/> 6 <hr/>					<hr/> 616½ <hr/>

The annual rental of the above estates is stated to have been - - - - - £46. 16s. 9d.

The estates have been increased since the above schedule was completed, by the lands allotted to the Burgesses on the inclosure of the Marshland and Wisbech Fens, and they now consist of 695A. 3R. 5P. The lands are let on lease

for the term of twenty years, by public auction ; the rents are of course very high, in consequence of the competition created by the rapid increase of the population, and the improving state of the drainage ; but little regard however is had as to the mode of cultivation. It has always occurred to us, that the system of long leases should be abandoned, the lands let at a fair rent either from year to year, or for the term 3, 5 or 7 years ; that the Corporation should plant trees and quick fences, and the tenants be required to preserve them, and cultivate the lands according to the usual and most approved course of husbandry adopted by the proprietors of the adjoining estates.

*Statement of Tonnage Duties received by the Collector for the Corporation in the Port of Wisbech, from 1805, to 1835.**

TONS.		TONS.	
1805	29,242	1820	62,030
1806	29,816	1821	52,191
1807	28,313	1822	60,140
1808	35,416	1823	64,611
1809	32,128	1824	70,000
1810	34,954	1825	70,32
1811	46,243	1826	44,095
1812	45,340	1827	41,552
1813	43,110	1828	66,162
1814	42,584	1829	55,040
1815	38,995	1830	63,180
1816	46,611	1831	71,037
1817	51,860	1832	78,322
1818	64,191	1833	81,778
1819	52,622	1834	86,618

The tonnage duties received from the 5th of January, 1833, to the 5th of January, 1834, (3d per ton under the old Act of Parliament, and 6d per ton under the new Outfall Act, with double those rates on foreign ships) amounted to the sum of £3072. 6s. 9d.

* From the 6th January, 1834, to 6th January, 1835, there were imported 39,122 chaldrons of coals, and 12,587 tons of general merchandise; and there were exported, 34,992 tons, one fifth part of which consisted of wool and seeds, and the remainder corn, grain, and flour; the exportation of wheat has increased during the last two or three years to a very considerable extent, in consequence of the increased fertility of the lands occasioned by the improvement of the drainage.

*General Annual Income and Expenditure of the Capital
Burgesses.*

PRINCIPALLY COLLECTED FROM THE ACCOUNTS OF 1833.

C H A R I T Y F U N D S .

R E C E I P T S .

	£.	s.	d.	£.	s.	d.
Rents of Estates including one third of the Fleet Rents received every third year	362	13	0			
Interest on Money invested on Govern- ment Securities	150	12	6			
				513	5	6

P A Y M E N T S .

Amount paid to Magdalen Scholars; the Treasurer of Charity Schools; and expended in coals, corn, and clothing for the Poor	477	6	1			
Repairs, quit-rents, and incidental ex- pences	35	19	5			
				513	5	6

The sum of £3. 15s. is paid out of the general estates for charitable purposes, being the Dole referred to in the charter; and also the sum of £139. 5s. 8d., being the interest of several sums amounting to the sum of £2785. 15s. given by different individuals for the benefit of the Schools, the Dorcas Charity, and other purposes, and paid over to the Burgesses.

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PORT AND HARBOUR.

INCOME.

	£.	s.	d.	£.	s.	d.
Amount of tonnage duties (in 1833) ...				2992	1	3

EXPENDITURE.

One year's interest on debt of £28,000.	1400	0	0			
Collector's poundage	118	18	7			
Expences of buoys, beacons, and mooring posts	493	10	7			
Salaries to Harbour-master and Clerk to Commissioners of Pilotage	45	0	0			
Annual amount required to form sinking fund	500	0	0			
Balance applicable to the improvement of the river	434	12	1			
				2992	1	3

GENERAL ESTATES.

INCOME.

	£.	s.	d.	£.	s.	d.
Rents of lands				1634	1	0
Average of fines received on letting lands				140	0	0
Rent of corn exchange and market tolls				443	11	0
Crane and wharf				100	0	0
Town hall vaults				13	10	0
				2331	2	0

EXPENDITURE.

	£.	s.	d.	£.	s.	d.
Amount of annuities	782	12	0			
Interest on mortgages and bonds	457	19	2			
Ditto on charity funds	139	5	8			
Salaries of Officers and Master of the Grammar School	152	19	0			
Watching, lighting, and cleansing the town	528	17	8			
Tradesmens' bills for repairs, quit-rents, insurances, and other payments	123	4	0			
Clear surplus income	146	4	6			
	<hr/>			2331	2	0

GENERAL SUMMARY OF INCOME.

	£.	s.	d.
Charity Estates	513	5	6
Port and Harbour	2992	1	3
General Estates	2331	2	0
	<hr/>		
	£5836	8	9
	<hr/>		

THE END.

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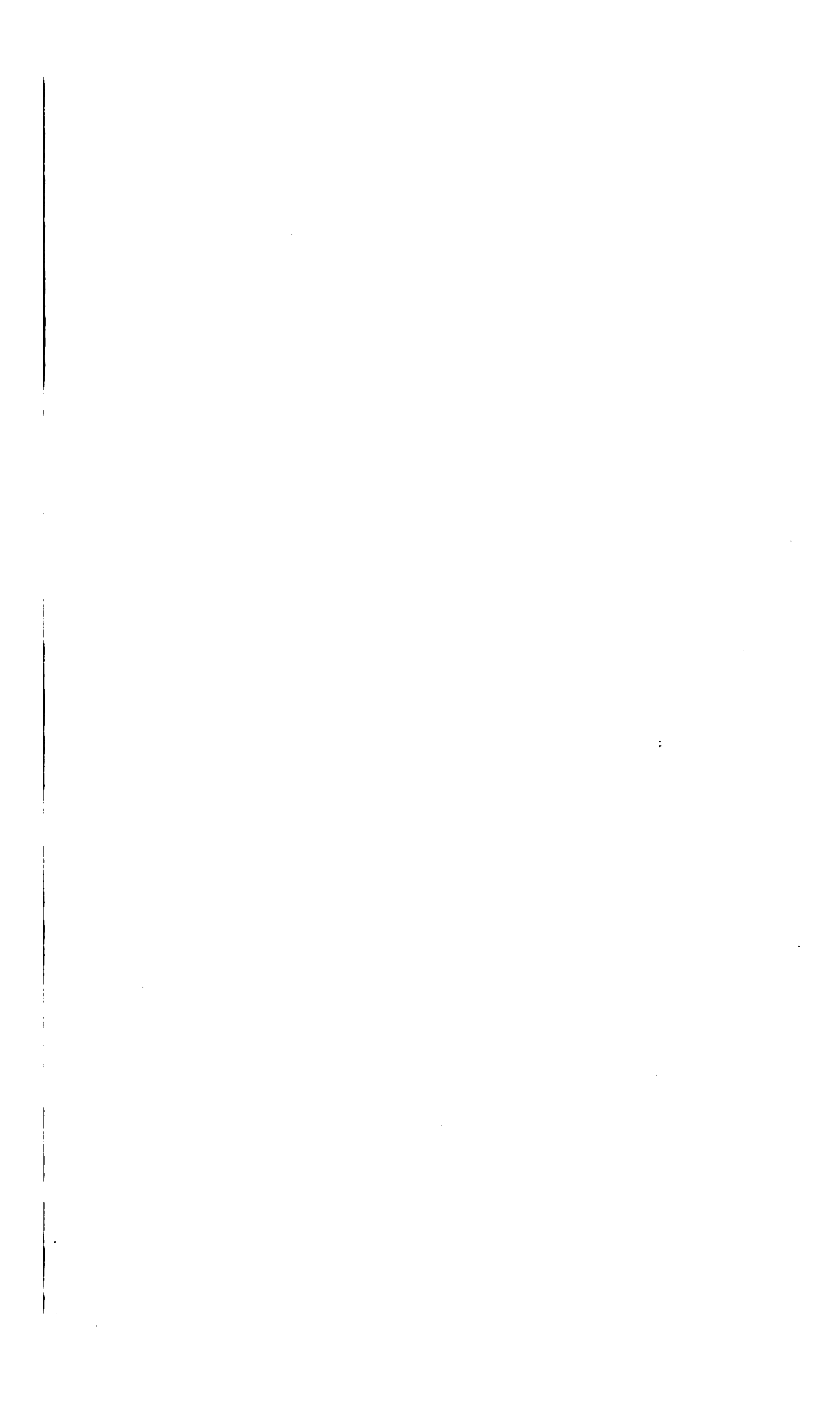
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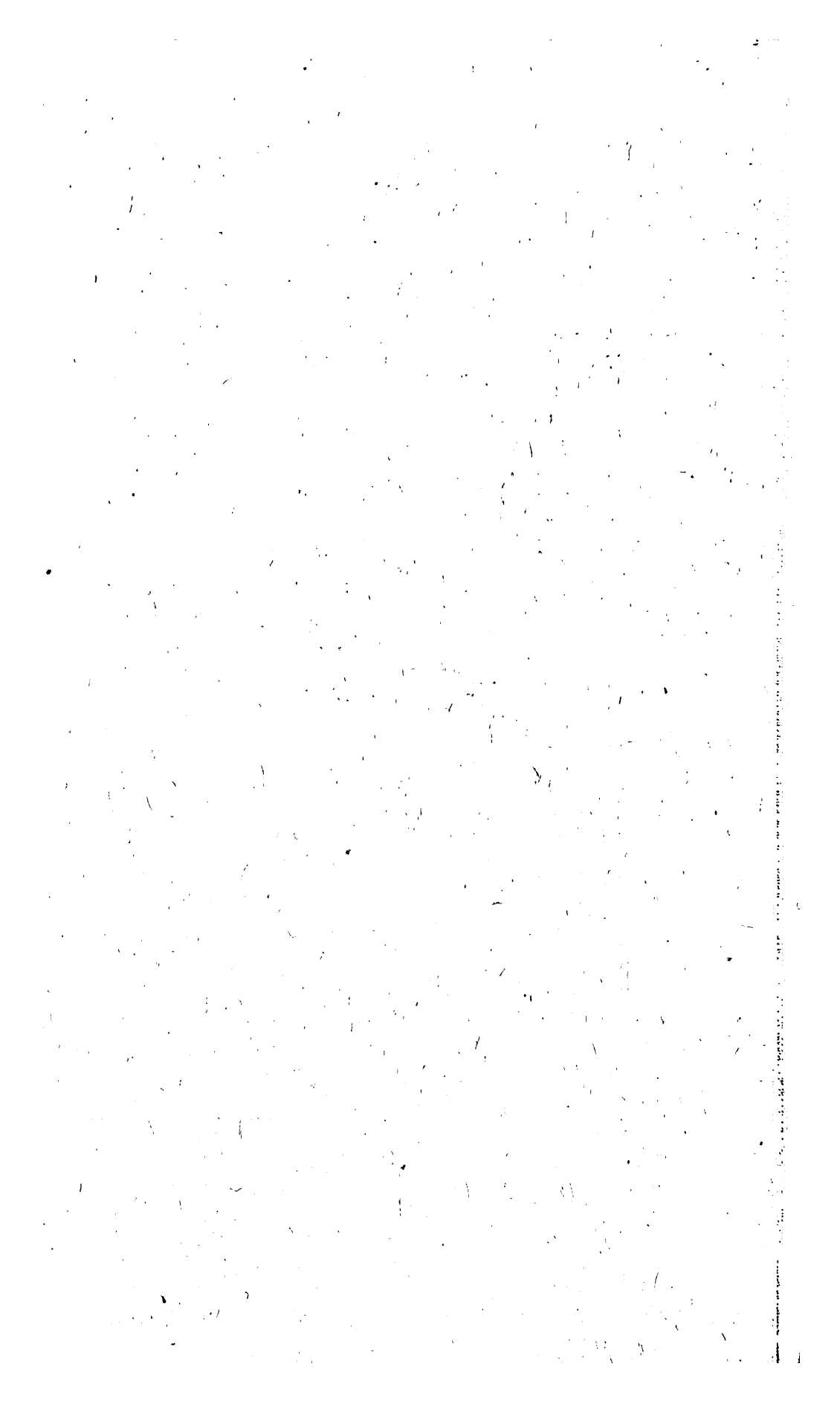
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L' E N V O Y.

HAVING at length completed this Work, after some unavoidable delays, the Editor has a few remarks to make, which he will comprise in as short space as possible. That a History of Wisbech is a dull record of unimportant matter, need not be told to any who are at all acquainted with its past state. As however, it is ancient, opulent, and daily increasing its importance and wealth, there are sufficient arguments to warrant curiosity and research into the causes of its growth, or at least the events by which that growth has been marked. In every other respect it is singularly deficient in materials either for thought or narrative; deficient in antiquities, in incident, in historical association, and in beauty of surrounding scenery. The facts stated in the first portion of the Work, are principally collected from Colonel Watson's History, and from a manuscript which accidentally came into our possession; and we are also indebted to a gentleman, who has been throughout, the unwearied supporter to our undertaking. His writing we must here expressly state, makes not only the most considerable portion in bulk, but possesses all the originality the Work may possess. Every part of the later history, the buildings, the improvements, the charities, have all been described by him from original documents or accurate knowledge. To him we are also indebted for the Preface, and also for superintending the Work through the Press, from its commencement; and he has added every illustration which extensive local and general information has enabled him to give. The labor of such kindness must be obvious to every one; it is but few who would have undertaken such a task, especially amidst the engagement of an arduous profession; and fewer who, would not have been disgusted with its monotony long before its conclusion, since it has been composed at irregular intervals as the opportunities of the Press required. Were we to make our acknowledgments more individually, it would perhaps, be more than he would sanction; but the statement we have made is no less necessary to the public than to him.

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